British Foreign Policy 1874–1914

The role of India

Sneh Mahajan



London and New York

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This book provides a challenging analysis of British foreign policy at a time when Britain possessed the biggest empire that humankind has ever known. In this empire India had a unique position, comprising 97 per cent of Britain's Asiatic empire. All British statesmen deemed it essential to maintain their hold over India whatever the costs, risks and enigmas of doing so.

Historians writing on British foreign policy have tended to focus on relations with European countries and the Ottoman Empire, without imparting much sense of what it meant for Britain to be the centre of a global empire. In contrast, by highlighting the links between Britain's foreign policy and Imperial experience, this work focuses on aspects which have hitherto remained marginalised. It also contributes to debates surrounding the origins of the First World War, the forces behind expansion of empire, and the nature of imperial connections.

Students and historians studying British foreign policy, Anglo-Indian relations, international relations, diplomatic and imperial history, strategic history and relations between Britain and India will find this a valuable and thought-provoking work.

Sneh Mahajan is a Reader at Indraprastha College, University of Delhi and has been Academic Visitor to the London School of Economics and Political Science. Her publications include *Imperialist Strategy and Moderate Politics* (1983), a Hindi translation of James Joll's *Europe Since 1870* (1991) and many articles and book reviews in academic journals.

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Preface

During 'the age of high imperialism', about one-quarter of the global land surface was distributed or redistributed as colonies amongst half a dozen states. In such an age, for a great colonial power like Britain national security did not imply just the need to take protective measures to ensure the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Great Britain. It implied preservation of its great power status. The framers of British foreign policy linked Britain's continued standing as a great power inextricably with the retention and expansion of its worldwide empire. Nowhere did this symbiosis of world power and empire seem more apparent to them than in the Indian Empire.[1] India remained the centrepiece of their Empire. By the early 1870s, the colonies of white settlement – Canada, Australia, New Zealand and the Cape Colony – had been granted responsible government. In 1880, of Britain's global empire still ruled from London, the Indian Empire, covered 85 per cent in terms of territory. Of Britain's Asiatic Empire, it covered about 97 per cent of the total area. In terms of population, even in 1912, i.e., even after all the acquisitions of the age of imperialism, of every 100 persons in Britain and its empire (dependent and self-governing together) 10 lived in the United Kingdom, 5 lived in the self-governing dominions, 12 in all other colonies put together and 73 in the Indian Empire alone. Given the size and the resources of the Indian Empire, the issues relating to this empire could not be peripheral to anything. This empire was jealously guarded. The politico-military exercises carried out by the British government always included issues that might threaten the security of the Raj. There has been an outgoing debate amongst historians on the issue whether the Indian Empire was an asset or a liability. The attitude of British rulers towards India was condescending or patronising, when not contemptuous. But they had no doubt whatever at any stage that control over India had to be maintained. In 1901, in a memorandum on the 'Military Needs of the Empire in a War with France and Russia', the Military Intelligence Division noted:

> Speaking broadly as long as the Navy fulfils its mission, the British Empire is impervious to the great land forces of continental nations except in one point – India. Here alone can a fatal blow be dealt us. The loss of India by conquest would be a death blow to our prosperity, prestige and power....

> Next in importance, then, and second only to the security of the United Kingdom itself, comes the question of the defence of India.[2]

One comes across such statements in British archival records time and again.[3]

On the continent, Britain's permanent interest lay in the continuation of the balance of power. During the period under consideration here, no single power or combination of powers dominated the continent at any time. Britain was able to maintain its naval supremacy also. Britain's policy makers did not envisage any threat to their 'home' country from any power. But they apprehended danger to their Indian Empire from all their continental rivals at different times. Many problems of British foreign policy arose out of the need to forestall or counter this threat. International relations and antagonisms had to be manipulated with an eye on their effect on the connection with India. India seemed most vulnerable to pressure from Russia. In December 1901 Arthur Balfour wrote to Lansdowne:

> The weakest spot in the Empire is probably the Indian frontier…A quarrel with Russia anywhere, about anything, means the invasion of India and, if England were without allies, I doubt whether it would be possible for the French to resist joining in the fray. Our position would then be perilous.[4]

All British governments, irrespective of the political party that formed the government at any given time, accepted that the Indian Empire had to be defended. During 1874–1914, the statesmen responsible for taking foreign policy decisions – Disraeli, Gladstone, Salisbury, Balfour and Grey – deemed it essential to maintain hold over India, whatever the risks, costs and enigmas of doing so. Even during the Second World War the thought of relinquishing control over India occurred only as a remote possibility. Visible or not, the questions of defending the frontiers of the Indian Empire and the routes to India remained powerful constituents of Britain's worldview. To the extent that British statesmen were conscious of the need to maintain the Empire, they were bound to work for it.

However, in studies of British foreign policy, the issue of defending the Indian Empire has received little more than formal acknowledgement. Some historians have drawn attention to the neglect of the imperial factor in writing British history. In the editorial to the 1993 issue of *History Workshop*, the editors complained that it still seems possible for British historians to produce the social, cultural and political histories of Britain of the last 300 years which more or less ignore the fact that during this period Britain governed the most extensive empire the world has ever seen. Whether these editors excluded historians of British diplomacy from this stricture is not very clear. The noted historian P.J. Marshall has absolved them and has said that diplomatic historians have long abandoned the tendency to write almost exclusively Europe-centred histories.[5] But books published on questions on the how and why of British foreign policy tend to pass over the role that issues arising out of the possession of India and

the defence of routes to India played in conditioning foreign policy decisions. In his *The Realities Behind Diplomacy*, Paul Kennedy, who has produced several magisterial studies of international history, discusses the conditions under which the British government would lead the nation to war and says that 'the British would certainly fight for India against Russian assault'.[6] But, in the text, the Indian question at best peers through at certain places. This is as much true of the surveys by Kenneth Bourne and M.E. Chamberlain, as of the more specialised study by Zara Steiner.[7]

This is true of many of the detailed studies as well. Richard Millman's study of the Eastern Question has been written after painstaking research into an enormous range of primary sources. But like Seton-Watson's classic *Disraeli, Gladstone and the Eastern Question* published two generations earlier, it discusses the Eastern Question as a series of anti-Russian manoeuvres and as an issue of European balance of power.[8] Britain's concern for the route to India is thrown in only as an added dimension. The fact that Britain was taking interest in the region primarily to protect the route to India is at best assumed.[9] The failure to discuss the Eastern Question in the geopolitical context detracts from its usefulness. Same is the case of G. Martel's study of Rosebery's foreign policy. He claims that he has used 'every letter, report and memoranda that passed between London and major capitals of Europe during this period'.[10] One running theme in his book is that Rosebery wanted 'to be with the Triple Alliance and not of it'. He gives two reasons – one, that Rosebury regarded the Triple Alliance as Britain's best guarantee of security outside Europe and another that France and Russia were viewed as antagonistic powers. But he does not ask further questions like: What sort of security did Britain want outside Europe? Why were France and Russia viewed as antagonistic powers? One reason why Rosebery (in fact all British governments) tried to maintain friendly relations with the Central Powers was that hostility of these powers to Russia forced Russia to keep part of its armed forces on the European frontier and thus this relieved Russia's pressure on the northwest frontier of the Indian Empire. Similarly, France and Russia were viewed as antagonistic powers not because they could pose any threat to the British Isles but primarily because each of them separately seemed to have the will and the capacity to threaten the Indian Empire – Russia on the northwest and France in the east. After the Franco-Russian Alliance was formed, France could delay the transport of troops to India via the Suez by using its navy in the Mediterranean. Any discussion of Britain's foreign policy in a purely European context, thus, presents only a distorted view of international relations.

Some historians have taken note of the Indian factor, but their works relate primarily to the Anglo-Russian setting in Asia.[11] The historian who has really situated Britain's foreign policy in a worldwide context and has taken cognizance of the strains imposed on it by the possession of India is Keith Wilson.[12] His conclusions that the British were much less interested in Europe than in the empire, that they regarded themselves as being less threatened by Germany than by Russia, and that for the British government the achievement of friendly relations with Russia was an end in itself hang on this issue. I wish to acknowledge

my indebtedness to his work. However, his work is largely confined to the decade preceding the First World War.

In effect, even contemporary records – notes, letters, minutes, despatches and speeches on foreign policy – do not really give an idea of the centrality of the Indian factor. What could be the reasons for shunning references to the Indian Empire? This could be the result of several factors. In foreign policy national interest is the key concept. There is a broad general consensus about what constitutes national interests. But these are rarely spelled out. In Britain it was never disputed that the maintenance of the Indian Empire was a national interest. As R. Robinson and J. Gallagher put it, 'To all British statesmen, India and the British Isles were the twin centres of their wealth and strength in the world as a whole.'[13] British statesmen and politicians perhaps merely assumed that there was no need to state the obvious. In any case, they are particularly known for restraint and understatement in spelling out their motives.[14] Secondly, in international relations, relatively seldom is it possible to assert that a particular pattern of thinking resulted in this decision or that action. Hence, in explaining the conduct of those determining a country's international relations the importance of perceptions, ingrained attitudes, images and assumptions – both spoken and unspoken – is being increasingly recognised. The underlying consensus that control over India was non-negotiable remained an unstated presupposition in this context and this is reflected in research by historians.

Another reason for not according cognizance to the Indian factor as a tenet of British foreign policy could be the benefactors' commitment to the endeavours of a superior kind. British statesmen, officials and the public took exceptional pride in their ethical commitments. They earnestly believed that Britain's control over the far-flung regions of the world promoted justice, peace and prosperity. But control over India did not fit into the world order that they professed to establish. Since the time of Robert Clive and Warren Hastings in the second half of the eighteenth century, the Indian Empire was seen as an empire acquired by pursuit of self-interest, plunder and exercise of arbitrary power. The result was that they deliberately tended to leave out the Indian connection. For example, John Stuart Mill left India out of his autobiography though he served at the India Office at London for thirty-five long years and even his father was in the service of the East India Company for decades.[15] So, this omission could not have been a result of any oversight on his part. He seems to have left India out because it did not fit in the picture he wished to project of a great mind being formed by interaction with other great minds. Another tendency has been to treat India as an exception to whatever was applicable to other colonies. The radical politician, Richard Cobden, whose name is synonymous with *laissez-faire* doctrines and free trade, actually advocated that the British government in India should make an all-out effort to promote the cultivation and transportation of cotton in India so as to assist Britain's cotton industry.[16] For the same reason, Sir John Seeley, in his extremely influential book, *The Expansion of England*, found it difficult to fit India into his typology of an organic British Empire he wished to project. Ultimately he presented his arguments in two parts – one on British expansion in other

countries and one on British expansion in India.[17] Politicians, officials and scribes, and following them historians, have used phrases like 'national interest', 'vital interests', 'British interests', 'imperial interests', 'Mediterranean interests', 'British interests in Constantinople', etc., in the context of British policy in the Mediterranean, the Near East and in the context generally of the Anglo-Russian setting in Asia. In fact, as we shall see, these were euphemisms for 'in the interest of defence of frontiers of India' or for 'in the interest of the security of the route to India'. Thus historians writing on Britain's foreign policy have not been able to leave readers with much sense of what it meant for Britain to be the centre of a global empire.

In this book, an attempt has been made to turn away from the Euro-centric preoccupations of historians and to situate Britain's relations with the other European states in a global context. It has been argued that the commitment to defend the Indian Empire and to safeguard the routes thereto powerfully influenced the perceptions, and hence decisions, of all those responsible for conducting Britain's relations with the Great Powers of Europe, namely, Russia, France, Germany, Austria-Hungary and Italy. This focus on the Indian Empire will help in placing Britain's foreign policy initiatives in Europe, in the Near East, the Middle East, North Africa, South Africa and Central Asia in a much wider context of Britain's interests and obligations. The fact that far-reaching precautions were taken for the protection of the Indian Empire implies that some benefits must have accrued to Britain. The work thus adds a non-economic dimension to the long-standing controversy on the costs/benefits of imperialism. In suggesting that the empire was beneficial, this study also underlines that Britain's foreign policy was influenced by *innenpolitik*, that is domestic, political, economic and financial considerations and constraints.

This study centres on London. The government of India was a subordinate government – an arm of the British government. The epicentre of relations of the government of India with neighbouring states was London, not Calcutta, Delhi or Simla. The mere hierarchy of power ensured that, in all external affairs, the views of the metropolitan authority prevailed.

The book follows a chronological outline. There was marked continuity in the attitude of the British government in so far as the question of security of the Indian Empire was concerned. Each chapter covers a span of five to seven years and terminates at oft-used dividing points marked by either change in government or a shift of focus in foreign policy perspective. In highlighting how the possession of India affected the choices made at the metropole, this study does not exclude other interpretations. It explores a dimension, a decisive one, which has so far been subsumed in the Eurocentric preoccupations of historians in their studies of Britain's relations with other European states. It is confined to the period 1874 to 1914 because the study of the entire period of British rule in India would have become unwieldy. In any case, in world history, this period is described as the period of 'neo-imperialism', 'high imperialism' or 'classical imperialism' and, therefore, any study of interaction between the metropole and periphery during this period has relevance of its own.

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1 Constructing Britain's foreign policy

In the 1870s Great Britain was the 'top' nation, possessing a flourishing industrial economy, the strongest naval force, the finest merchant fleet and the biggest empire the world has ever known. Even by 1914, among the Great Powers, Britain alone possessed territories and interests in every part of the globe. There were many emulators in maritime and colonial fields, but no rivals for pre-eminence. Those responsible for conducting the foreign policy of such a state were bound to work for ensuring the security of the homeland as well as for maintaining its Great Power status. This conditioned their perceptions and hence the conduct of relations with other European powers.

Factors influencing British foreign policy

Defence of the homeland

As in all states in all ages, British statesmen formulated their foreign policy with the aim of ensuring the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the British Isles. In the post-1870 scenario when each 'Great Power' of Europe faced the possibility of direct attack from at least two powers, British statesmen had far less anxiety on this score. So long as they could ensure the predominance of their navy, their country's geographical position as an island off the north-west coast of Europe made their country immune to any threat of invasion. Their main concern was that the lowland region near the North Sea, forming the lower basin of the Rhine, Meuse and Scheldt rivers, corresponding to modern Belgium, Netherlands and Luxemburg, should remain free from domination by another major power. It was both an economic and a strategic question because it involved the effective flow of goods in and out of Britain as well as fear of invasion proper. Under a treaty signed in 1839, five powers – Britain, France, Russia, Austria and Prussia – had guaranteed the neutrality of Belgium. This implied that if any of the guarantor states infringed that neutrality, each of the others could claim a right (and in certain circumstances would have a duty) to resist the infringement.[1] In 1870, at the time of the Franco-Prussian War, Belgium's neutrality was re-affirmed when both France and Prussia respected it and Britain reiterated that it accepted its responsibilities as a guarantor.

Between 1870 and 1906 the British strategists did not contemplate, even remotely, the problem of sending an expeditionary force to the continent. All studies made of the possible invasion of Britain concluded that at best a raid of relatively small proportions was feasible, for which Britain's regular army was sufficient. When the question of the military needs of Britain in a war with France and Russia was considered in 1889, it was accepted that in view of the strength of its navy, the invasion of the United Kingdom in force was so much beyond the bounds of reasonable probability as not to be worth seriously considering.[2] All political parties agreed on the need to maintain a good margin of naval supremacy. It was only when Germany decided to construct its own dreadnoughts that British statesmen gave thought to the possibility of direct attack on the British Isles.

Ensuring great power status

It was vitally important for Britain's policy makers to maintain Britain's standing as a great power. It is generally said that Britain's great power status was based on three things: its industrial and commercial strength, its maritime supremacy and its worldwide empire. It may, however, be pointed out that trade and the navy by themselves did not confer greatness on Britain. These were enabling factors, or mere instruments of power. They cannot be evaluated in any context other than that of determining to what extent these fulfilled the objectives for which these existed. It was Britain's empire which was the most visible expression of Britain's standing in the affairs of the world.

In the mid-nineteenth century, Britain produced about two-thirds of the world's coal, about half of its iron, five-sevenths of its steel and two-fifths of the entire world output of traded manufactured goods. Britain was incomparably the largest exporter of capital, of invisible financial and commercial services and of transport services.[3] All British statesmen recognised that Britain's continued prosperity depended on the smooth and satisfactory flow of goods into and out of the country. The need to guard the trade routes became inextricably woven with the question of national security.

Throughout the nineteenth century, Britain enjoyed maritime hegemony. In the 1860s and 1870s the Royal Navy was concerned with the French, Russian and Italian navies, and in terms of strength it compared very favourably to any one, two, or even all three of these naval powers. This navy was an amalgam of two forces designed for two divergent, though related, roles. During the mid-Victorian period, one force consisted mostly of ironclads and was meant for national defence and for intervention in European affairs. The other contained many types of ships from gunboats to corvettes, and performed the task of a maritime constabulary.[4] Britain possessed over a score of naval bases around the globe including Admiral Fisher's 'five keys' that locked the world: Dover, Gibraltar, Alexandria, the Cape and Singapore.[5] Britain's naval mastery was the most visible and potent instrument of Britain's power and prestige. It ensured the safety of worldwide trade, which amounted to 40 per cent of world trade

and uninterrupted supply of foodstuffs to Britain. Prior to the First World War, over 60 per cent of the calories consumed in Britain were imported.[6] There was such concern about the effect of war on the food supply that in February 1903 a group calling itself the Association to Promote an Official Enquiry into the Security of our Food Supply in Time of War was formed.[7] In 1904 Sir John Fisher wrote: 'If the navy is not supreme, no army, however large, is of slightest use. It is not invasion we have to fear if our navy is beaten. IT'S STARVATION'.[8] British strategists remained concerned about the ability to send reinforcements to India in the shortest possible time. In this context, the navy had a vital role. It also controlled the worldwide cable network. One comes across frequent references to the humanitarian role of the navy, for example, in the suppression of piracy and slave trade. But, as A.J. Marder says, this aspect was commonly introduced to buttress Britain's claims to naval supremacy.[9]

The navy also acted as a very important instrument of foreign policy. In this context, historians tend to refer mostly to 'gunboat diplomacy', that is, occasional punitive expeditions. They also say that in the nineteenth century, after the Crimean War, the navy did not fire a shot in anger against any great power. But such arguments tend to obscure the Royal Navy's pivotal role as a tool for foreign policy. In early 1878, the British fleet was stationed off Constantinople. The fact that it did not fire a shot cannot undercut the threat posed to Russia by its presence there. In 1881, the Liberal government under Gladstone was a party to the naval demonstration that forced the Ottoman Empire to make concessions to Montenegro and Greece. All British governments, irrespective of the party in power, all strategists and businessmen and the people accepted that command of the seas was essential to their commerce, to their empire, in fact to their very survival. One task of the nation's leadership was to achieve this. In 1894, Gladstone resigned over his Cabinet's decision to support the Admiralty's demand for more ships, but even he did not deny that Britain's maritime supremacy was a vital interest.[10] In the decade before the First World War, the German decision to build a navy roused alarms and turned animosity between Britain and Germany into open rivalry.

In 1870, Britain possessed the biggest empire. In the age of imperialism that is under study here, the colonial criterion was added to economic, demographic and military indices. It was expected that the ascendant powers would demonstrate their might by expansion beyond their frontiers. This idea was obvious everywhere; in the press, in scholarly debates and in the self-esteem of policy makers. Between 1876 and 1915, about one-quarter of the globe's surface was claimed as colonies by a handful of states, mainly Britain, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Belgium, the USA and Japan. Britain's share was the biggest; it increased its territories by four million square miles. France acquired some 3.5 million square miles and Germany more than a million, while Italy acquired just under one million.[11] Russia's expansion was mostly into adjoining territories and is difficult to measure. By the end of the nineteenth century Britain's empire extended over one-fifth of the world's land surface. Britain had interests in much of the remaining global surface. In the days when the pervasion

of Darwinist ideas and imperial expansion were reinforcing a hierarchical view of the world, the possession of empire conferred on Britain a unique position in the eyes of its own citizens. It is doubtful whether the idea of 'burden' or 'mission' ever meant much to the masses. But for them there certainly was magnetism and music in the phrase 'the empire of the world'.

Those who conducted Britain's foreign policy showed a strong consciousness that Britain's Great Power identity required the retention of this empire. Those outside the government commented on the popular excitement generated by possession of the empire. Writing in *The Nineteenth Century* in the summer of 1877, Edward Dicey, an eminent journalist, said: 'Preservation of our dominion in the East is of paramount importance to us, only less important indeed, than the preservation of our national independence'. He added that this opinion was shared by a large majority of Englishmen.[12] A well-conducted Empire became a matter of pride not just for the Liberals but for the Radicals as well. The latter criticised only less savoury characteristics of imperialism like 'jingoism'. Their criticism rarely rose higher than mere polemic, and they fought shy of offering any alternatives.[13] Even the Labour Party inherited this pride in the empire. Its statement on colonial policy made as late as 1943 did not envisage dismantling the empire. It pronounced that 'for a considerable time to come' most colonial peoples 'will not be ready for self-government'.[14]

Importance of India

In Britain's empire, as Table 1.1 shows, the Indian Empire had an overwhelming presence. In 1880, it accounted for about 85 per cent of the entire global empire of Britain which was ruled from London.[15] This dependent empire covered 2,246,000 square miles. Of this, the Indian Empire (British India and the princely states together) extended over 1,904,900 square miles while the total area of all other dependent colonies put together was only 341,100 square miles.[16] In terms of population, in 1872, of all men, women and children living in Britain and its empire, including persons living in Dominions with responsible government, over 78 per cent lived in the Indian Empire. Even in 1912, that is to say, after all the acquisitions of 'the age of neo-imperialism', in this empire 10.2 per cent lived in the United Kingdom, 5.4 per cent lived in the Dominions with responsible government, 11.7 per cent lived in the dependent empire excluding India, while 72.6 per cent lived in the Indian Empire alone.[17]

In Asia, outside the Indian Empire, Britain possessed only Ceylon, the Straits Settlements, Hongkong and Aden.[18] In official documents one often comes across expressions like 'the Eastern Empire', 'the Asiatic Empire', 'our Indian Empire and other dependencies', 'our possessions in the Orient', and so on. Such expressions do not convey the fact that in 1881 the Indian Empire covered some 97 per cent of Britain's Asiatic Empire. While the Indian Empire covered 1,905,000 square miles, the rest of the empire in Asia covered only about 51,400 square miles. The phrases and expressions referred to above amounted to mere euphemisms for the Indian Empire.

Table 1.1 Dependent colonies of British Empire in 1880 (thousands of square miles)

1 Europe	
a Gibraltar	0.0
b Malta	0.1
c Ionian Islands	0.7
d Cyprus	3.6
2 Asia	
a The Indian Empire (including Princely States)	1904.9
b Ceylon	25.3
c Straits Settlements and Federated Malay States	15.3
d Hongkong	0.4
e Aden	10.4
3 Africa	
a Mauritius	0.8
b Seychelles	0.2
c Asscencion and St Helena	0.1
d Gambia	4.0
e Sierra Leone	30.0
f Gold Coast	91.7
g Lagos	28.6
h Basutoland	11.7
4 Caribbean and South America	110.8
5 The Pacific (Fiji)	7.4
Total	2246.0

Notes
The table excludes self-governing dominions in Canada, Australia and South Africa. The last of these was given responsible government in 1872.
The table has been compiled from Davis and Huttenback (1986: 27–8).

India also furnished the base from which Britain established political and commercial relations with the countries in the Far East, South-East Asia, West Asia and East Africa. It would not be out of place to mention that China remained a region of marginal importance in Britain's overall trade and strategy. Around 1900, though above 80 per cent of China's trade was controlled by Britons,[19] only about 3 per cent of British exports went to China; and by 1914 only about 4 per cent of the total British capital invested abroad went to China.[20] China was not even situated on the route to any destination of importance to Britain. On China's western frontier too, it was accepted that friendly relations with the government of China were not likely to be of help in checking the expansion of Russia towards the provinces on China's western frontier because Peking did not exercise direct control over the frontier provinces of Kashgar and Yarkand.[21]

Britain wanted that it be left in unmolested enjoyment of its vast and splendid possessions, of which India was the omphalos. Ever since the English East India Company acquired control over parts of the Indian subcontinent, it had acted with alacrity to even the remotest threat to its possessions. Even the European Powers knew this. In 1798, during the French Revolutionary wars, the French

government sent Napoleon to Egypt. Whether the purpose was to disturb Britain's communications with India or to carve out an empire in India, or whether it was a move in the French strategy of defeating Britain, the point is that even at this early date, India was considered valuable. The British, too, who at that time had control only over the provinces of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa and a few conclaves in the rest of India, sent Admiral Horatio Nelson to Egypt, the latter going on to win the famous battle of the Nile. In July 1807, when Napoleon and Tsar Alexander I signed the Treaty of Tilsit, they held a series of discussions about a joint invasion of India. The British government then launched a diplomatic offensive. It sent missions to Sind, Punjab, Muscat, Afghanistan and Persia.[22] To strengthen the outlying defences of India, the islands of Réunion and Mauritius were captured from the French and those of the Moluccas and Java were taken from the Dutch, who were allies of the French. Subsequently, whenever control over India was even remotely menaced, the British saw no choice but to strain every nerve and muscle to defend it. At the time of the Great Revolt of 1857–8, the official and popular concern was proof that the loss of the Indian Empire was seen as a national catastrophe, which had to be prevented whatever the cost. In the age of new imperialism after the 1870s, when the acquisition of colonies itself became a status symbol irrespective of their value, it became imperative to ensure control over India. By 1902, in official circles, it became a doctrine of astonishing persistence that in fighting for India, Britain would be fighting for its imperial existence.[23] The determination to hold and manage this empire decisively influenced Britain's relations with the continental powers. James Joll aptly comments: 'It was imperial questions and especially those arising out of the possession of India and of the need to control the route to the East which conditioned British Foreign Policy'.[24]

Britain and the European powers

The map of Europe had been redrawn as a result of three wars fought between 1864 and 1870. Britain remained on the sideline during this period. In 1864, Palmerston's government did proclaim Britain's intent to uphold the territorial security of the duchies of Schleswig and Holstein. But Prussia and Austria did not pay attention to Palmerston's threatening words. Ultimately, Britain stood aside meekly as Austria and Prussia did as they pleased. During the Austro-Prussian and Franco-Prussian wars, Britain was virtually ignored by Europe. The Franco-Prussian War ended with the total defeat of France and the surrender of Paris to Prussian forces at the end of January 1871, and France was forced to surrender the two provinces of Alsace and Lorraine to the newly established German Empire. Gladstone's Liberal government did deplore the bloodshed, the despoliation of France and the annexation of Alsace and Lorraine by Germany, but Britain's interests were not directly involved and Gladstone's government never contemplated intervention. This war changed the balance of power decisively in Europe, but this was not evident to most British contemporaries.

Accustomed to centuries of French supremacy on the continent, they in fact hailed Prussia's victory as helping to create a balance of power.

The exclusion of Britain from European developments did cause unease in certain quarters, but this feeling was not widespread. With a far-flung empire, a flourishing economy and the greatest naval force in the world, Britons had other concerns. The general mood was well captured by Disraeli, who told his electors at the time of the Austro-Prussian War:

> The abstention of England from any unnecessary interference in the affairs of Europe is the consequence, not of her decline of power, but of her increased strength. England is no longer a mere European Power; she is the metropolis of a great maritime empire, extending to the boundaries of the farthest oceans. It is not that England has taken refuge in a state of apathy…She interferes in Asia, because she is really more an Asiatic power than a European. She interferes in Australia, in Africa, and New Zealand, where she carries on war often on a great scale.[25]

At the same time, being a European power, geographically, culturally and in its primary political and economic interests, Britain could not be indifferent to the happenings on the continent. In the speech referred to above, Disraeli highlighted this aspect when he said that there would be 'occasions in which it may be the duty of England to interfere in European Wars'.[26]

In discussing Britain's relations with other countries, historians tend to argue that Britain adhered to certain well-established principles and traditions. Particular emphasis is laid on three of these: first, that Britain was a satiated country which wanted to preserve peace and the status quo; second, that the aim of British policy was to maintain balance of power on the continent; and third, that during the closing decades of the nineteenth century Britain followed a policy of 'splendid isolation'. These factors were mentioned contemporaneously. British historians discuss these in very self-complimentary idioms. But the analysis of British foreign policy shows that each of these seems pertinent only if British foreign policy is situated in the European context alone. These appear inadequate when analysed in the context of Britain's worldwide concerns.

Britain was indeed interested in continuance of peace and was a satiated power in the sense that it did not have any territorial ambitions on the continent. Outside Europe, too, Britain enjoyed a hegemonic position and stood to lose by any change in the world order. But, though satisfied, Britain remained fearful. The essence of the situation was stated by none other than Gladstone, who observed that with a great empire at each of the four corners of the world, 'we may be territorially content, but less than ever at our ease'.[27] As we shall see later, the Indian frontier became a source of ceaseless anxiety so much so that at the end of the nineteenth century war against Russia over this issue, rather than defence of the Low Countries, was deemed the chief problem of British strategy. Further, at no stage did any British government subordinate the pursuit of the nation's perceived interests to the general interests of maintenance of peace. Nor

do the British statesmen stand forth as *partisans des status quo partout*. They extended the British Empire as and when it seemed feasible.

Coming to the second principle, the existence of balance of power certainly served Britain's interests. Any consolidation of Europe under one hostile power or a coalition of hostile powers was rightly considered fatal to Britain's political, economic and strategic security. But it is doubtful if Britain had the necessary resources to maintain the balance of power, that is, to manipulate antagonisms between European powers to this end. Throughout the nineteenth century Britain maintained a professional army that was smaller than Switzerland's. Its ability to influence continental affairs through its military presence was negligible.[28] If the British were to land their army on the German coast, Bismarck is reported to have quipped, he would call the local police and have it arrested.[29] On the eve of the South African War, the British army was in the doldrums. In March 1909 General Ewart, the Director of Military Operations, prepared a memorandum on 'The Value to a Foreign Power of an Alliance with the British Empire'. In this he concluded that the value was more 'latent' than 'actual'.[30] Britain's small professional army of six divisions was no match for the giant professional armies of the European powers. Britain could and did use the Indian army, which consisted of about 70,000 Britons and 120,000 Indians. But, for political reasons, it could not be withdrawn from India for long.

Lastly, British historians have continued to argue that during the last decades of the nineteenth century, Britain followed a policy of isolation. The self-complimentary way in which the policy is viewed is highlighted by the addition of the prefix 'splendid'. For example, Kenneth Bourne comments: 'The obstinacy with which British Foreign Secretaries resisted supposedly tempting offers of understanding and alliance mark them off from their colleagues overseas perhaps more strikingly than everything else.'[31] Historians have even recounted 'deviations' from this policy.[32] But a cursory glance at Cabinet Papers and diplomatic exchanges highlights that though Britain did not sign any formal alliance with any European power, down to 1914, Britain never remained either aloof or unconcerned. As we shall see, Britain negotiated with all powers, great and not so great, whenever its interests so demanded. The task of a diplomatic historian is to analyse the subtleties of connection that existed between Britain and Europe, not to dismiss them as non-existent. Britain's relations with the European powers were decisively influenced by Britain's natural determination to maintain its status as a great power and for this it seemed imperative to maintain the Raj.

During 1870–1914, international affairs were dominated by six self-styled Great Powers: Britain, Russia, France, Germany, Austria-Hungary and Italy. British statesmen tended to divide these into 'satisfied' Powers and 'restless' Powers. France and Russia were seen as 'restless', 'ambitious', 'hostile' or 'hungry' Powers, while Germany and Austria-Hungary were seen as 'satisfied' Powers. Italy was included amongst the 'hungry' Powers, but its position was different from that of France and Russia; as Salisbury commented, 'the objects of her appetite are no great matters to us'.[33]

In 1871, a unified German state was established in Central Europe. In this process Bismarck played a very important role. In Britain, its establishment was not resented. In fact, many, especially the Conservatives, welcomed the establishment of this unified state in the middle of Europe. They believed that the humiliation inflicted on France was likely to keep the latter's extra-European ambitions in check. Germany's efficient army could keep Russia's ambitions under restrain. Moreover, Britain and Germany had no reason to be antagonistic. As Lord Derby, the Foreign Secretary in the Conservative government, remarked, at least Germany knew that Britain would not make war on her, and the reverse was equally true.[34] Bismarck's renunciation of a *grossdeutsch* solution further allayed fears. Throughout Bismarck's period, Germany was looked upon as a satisfied power likely to maintain a balance in Europe, and with limited colonial ambitions. The pace of economic growth of Germany did not cause concern at this time, when Britain possessed 31.8 per cent of the world's manufacturing capacity compared with Germany's 13.2 per cent.[35] British statesmen also began to calculate that a power that possessed the most efficient army could serve Britain's purposes. Early in 1876, in a private letter, Odo Russel, the British ambassador at Berlin, wrote that the co-operation of Bismarck 'in the preservation of peace with us…would be a great gain'. He added: 'An unaccountable, ambitious, irresponsible genius with a million of soldiers at his disposal like Bismarck is a friend to cultivate'.[36] Until the end of the century, an Anglo-German war was never contemplated. During the 1880s and 1890s the brusque methods of German diplomacy did cause annoyance. At times the newspaper 'war' between the two countries seemed to provide proof of antagonism. But, as Paul Kennedy comments, 'Germany was a nuisance, but Russia was the traditional enemy, and France a possible foe'.[37] The British government as well as the press realised that it was difficult to spend too much time criticising the Germans when other powers posed a greater danger. It was only towards the turn of the century when Germany seemed to outperform Britain in the economic and industrial fields and began to build a navy and talk of *weltpolitik* that many began to perceive Germany as an antagonist.

After its defeat at Sadowa in 1866, Austria had accepted the *fait accompli* and had given up hopes of regaining its position in Central Europe. It was disinclined even to expand towards the southeast. In the hyphenated state of Austria-Hungary, which emerged as a result of the compromise (*Ausgleich*) of 1867, the Magyars obtained a position of equality with the Germans. Slavs outnumbered both Germans and Magyars. As any increase in territory towards the Balkans would have increased the proportion of Slavs still further, the Hapsburg government worked to maintain the *status quo*, to avoid war and to defend the monarchy's interests by diplomatic means as far as possible.[38] It firmly opposed movements for self-government by Croats, Serbs, Rumanians and Slovaks in its own empire. It therefore wanted the multinational Ottoman Empire to continue, because any success by the peoples of the Balkans in obtaining self-government would have resulted in its own demise. Economically, too, the capitalists at Vienna wanted the Balkans to remain under a single

government rather than disintegrating into many territorial units. Thus Austria-Hungary stood to gain by the continuance of the Ottoman Empire; but it did not have the means to uphold it. This fact was important for Britain. Britain could harness Austrian support to stall Russia's advances in this region. For geographical reasons, Austria could prevent Russia from moving its forces towards the Mediterranean or towards Constantinople by checking its advance in the Rumanian bottleneck. Further, if Britain ever wanted to send its army through the Black Sea to restrain Russia's advance towards the Indian Empire, the goodwill of Germany and Austria could ensure the co-operation of the Ottomans in this task. It was widely believed that the Hapsburg Empire would not last long. Grey described it as 'a star that might dissolve'.[39]

Austria came increasingly under Germany's influence. In 1873, the Dreikaisersbund was formed. This was a league of the Emperors of Germany, Austria-Hungary and Russia, oddly described as 'the Three Northern Courts'. In London, the formation of this League at this time, its revival in 1881 and later efforts to re-establish it throughout this period were watched with apprehension. In British diplomatic circles this grouping was described variously as 'the worst combination against us', 'a misfortune', 'a nightmare', 'that chronic condition' and so on. The Liberals saw in this an attempt to revive the Holy Alliance of 1815. Some others resented it because it rendered Britain diplomatically ineffectual on the continent. But a very important reason for such views was the subtle Indian connection. By relieving Russia of problems on its European frontier, it assisted Russia's Asiatic ambitions. If, on the contrary, Germany and Austria were friendly to Britain rather than Russia, the Russian army would remain tied to its European frontier and Britain would be relieved of anxieties regarding Russia's advance towards the frontiers of the Indian Empire.[40]

Italy also emerged as a unified state in 1870, but it had to struggle to be taken seriously as a Great Power.[41] It was a feeble military and naval power. In 1881 it possessed twenty ironclads, of which twelve were small and poorly armed.[42] It was not in a position to protect even its own seacoast, which had a circuit of about 2,500 sea miles. Italy's financial position rendered a large expenditure on its fleet impossible. So, for Britain, the value of the Italian fleet as reinforcement was not worth the obligation to safeguard Italian ports. Commercially, while the value to Italy of Britain's trade equalled that of France and Russia combined, for Britain, trade with Italy was subordinate in importance to its trade with France or Russia.[43] In 1882, the Triple Alliance of Germany, Austria-Hungary and Italy was formed. From the mid-1880s, Britain courted Italy as a link for entering into engagements with Germany. In the 1890s, when Britain courted Germany and Germany insisted on Britain joining the Triple Alliance, the Foreign Office held that while Germany and Austria were very useful friends as regards Turkey, Russia, Egypt and even France, an alliance with Italy would be 'unprofitable and even slightly onerous corollary to the German alliance'.[44]

France had been a rival of Britain for power and influence for centuries. It possessed a fleet that was next in size to that of Britain, and this made France the only country that could invade Britain. Even France's empire was next in size to

that of Britain. France could make itself unpleasant across the globe. Britain had taken a lead in defeating Napoleon, but after the defeat of Napoleon in 1815 something like 'a Liberal Alliance' had emerged based on similarity of political institutions and principles. Even during the last years of Napoleon III, France did not wholly lose British sympathy. The two countries worked together in many areas around the globe including Greece, Turkey, Italy, Syria, China and Mexico. In the 1870s, too, Gladstonian Liberals and the followers of Gambetta talked in terms of 'the Liberal Alliance'. After its defeat in the Franco-Prussian War, France was very eager to recover Alsace and Lorraine. This created intense enmity between France and Germany, so much so that France was not in a position to wage a war against Britain. Yet, in most quarters, morbid distrust of France persisted. The construction of the Suez Canal and later the occupation of Egypt increased bitterness between the two countries. British Admiralty was endowed with such healthy respect for the power of the French fleet that it took it as axiomatic that the enemy in the next war, as in the past, would be France. The possibility of France seizing London by a *coup de main* was discussed at Cabinet level in 1888.[45]

It was, however, the activities of the French in the vicinity of India and on the route to India which were watched with nervous concern. The small-scale presence of the French at Pondicherry in India was never perceived as a threat. But the French were expanding their Empire in South-East Asia, and this seemed to have ominous implications for the security of the eastern frontier of India. Further, having gained control over Algeria, the French looked covetously at the other Muslim states on the African coast of the Mediterranean, Morocco, Tunisia and Egypt. Of these states, French designs in Egypt, where they took special interest since Napoleon had failed to bequeath it to them, caused most anxiety. Distrust of France grew after France began to court Russia. This caused unease even before the formation of the Franco-Russian Alliance.[46] With the coming together of France and Russia in the 1890s and apprehensions caused by the building of railways by Russia in Central Asia, this question acquired more ominous contours. France was advancing loans to Russia to build railways in Central Asia so as to divert British energies to that region and allow France to strengthen its position in North Africa.[47] During the same period the Admiralty began to calculate that it could not send the fleet to the Eastern Mediterranean in case Russia decided to seize Constantinople without first neutralising the French fleet in the Western Mediterranean.[48]

Russia was also seen as a rival. The two hegemons of the post-1815 world were Britain and Russia. Britain was the greatest imperial, commercial and maritime power, but the immense size of its territory, a population of 113 million in 1887, and the contribution it had made to the defeat of Napoleon all made Russia a great European power. These two countries had remained virtually untouched by the revolutions of 1848 and, to contemporaries, seemed to be havens of strength and stability. Britain and Russia did not have any common frontier. British statesmen did not perceive any threat to their country's maritime supremacy from Russia at any stage. In the Baltic Sea, too, no differences arose

between Russia and Britain.[49] Yet, these two countries identified each other as enemies. In the last quarter of the nineteenth century it was a common assumption in Europe that the next great war – the inevitable war – would be fought between them.[50]

The question arises: why was Russia perceived as an enemy? Answering this question, Richard Millman states: 'It was the connection of two things, hatred of Russia and defence of Turkish integrity, reinforced by the accessibility of Turkey to sea power, which transformed the hostility felt for St Petersburg into the possibility of military confrontation with her'.[51] Britain did feel committed to maintaining the integrity of the Ottoman Empire. But such an argument begs further questions. Why was the question of maintaining the integrity of the Ottoman Empire so important for Britain? When Russia did not pose any threat to the security of Britain or its maritime supremacy, what lay behind Britain's antagonism towards Russia? Britain made determined efforts not just to obstruct Russia's advances towards the Mediterranean, but also towards West Asia and Central Asia. Why did Britain take so much interest in Persia even when 'the city' showed reluctance to invest money there?[52] Why did Britain send two military expeditions to Afghanistan? Any discussion of these questions in the context of balance of power in Europe expresses only the top layer of reality.[53] Answers to all these questions are related to Britain's determination to maintain its hold on the Indian Empire, whatever the risks. Britain's distrust of Russia stemmed from Russia's image as a giant sprawling south-eastwards and eastwards. Given this Anglo-Russian setting, introduction to Britain's relations with Russia merits a detailed presentation.

Britain and Russia

The struggle between Britain and Russia raged from the Aegean Sea in the West to the Sea of Japan in the East, sometimes as a cold war and sometimes as a hot one. It involved the Near East, West Asia, the Central Asian region, the Hindu Kush mountains, Tibet, Mongolia and the area up to the Pacific coast in the East.

In the Ottoman Empire, the interests of Britain and Russia were diametrically opposed. The historic mission of Russia was to reach the Mediterranean and thus acquire control over an ice-free coast for interaction with the rest of the world. Meanwhile, Russia wanted to strengthen its position at Constantinople. At this time the Ottoman Empire seemed to be edging towards disintegration. With the gradual rise of nationalist aspirations amongst the Balkan peoples, the ruling elite in Russia began to see the prospect of fulfilment of these ambitions. These prospects were increased by the fact that the peoples in the Balkans were Slavs and most belonged to the Greek Orthodox Church; thus they were of the same race and religion as the Russians. The Pan-Slav cause stirred strong emotions amongst a section of the Russian officials and intelligentsia. Britain worked to prevent the establishment of Russia's influence in this region.

Coming to Asia, in the Far East, Russia breached the port, later known as Vladivostok, in 1859. But Russia's expansion towards the Pacific was of less

concern for the Foreign Office because this area did not lie on the route to any destination of importance to the British government. Russia's efforts to expand in this region were viewed as an aspect of general increase in the power of Russia. But, as Britain's reaction to the events of 1904–5 showed, Britain did not trivialise even this aspect, and regularly made efforts to reach accommodation with Russia in north-east Asia.[54] In West Asia, in the early nineteenth century Russia had expanded in the region between the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea and had thereby reached the eastern frontier of the Turkish province of Armenia and the northern frontier of Persia. The wars with Persia during 1826–8 and with Turkey during 1828–9 were linked with the Russian decision to expand southwards from the Caucasus to the headwaters of the Euphrates and Tigris. It was felt that Russia could establish its influence in Syria and Armenia through the patronage of Christians in this area. This caused unease. As Salisbury wrote to A.H. Layard, the ambassador at Constantinople, in 1878, 'her [Russia's] influence over Syria and Mesopotamia would be a very serious embarrassment, and would certainly, through the connection of Baghdad with Bombay, make our hold on India more difficult'.[55] This was one reason why in 1878 it was thought 'absolutely and indispensably necessary' to have a post nearer at hand than Malta, and hence Cyprus was occupied. In Central Asia, after the Crimean War, Russia expanded not in one wave but in two. The first started from Orenberg and proceeded in the direction of Kabul in Afghanistan. In 1864 Chimkent was occupied; this was followed by the occupation of Tashkent in 1865, Khokhand and Bukhara in 1866 and Samarkand in 1868. With these annexations, Russia's sway extended up to the outlying portions of Afghan Turkestan. The second movement started from the Caspian Sea and was in the direction of Herat, near the Persian frontier. Khiva was occupied in 1873, and Merv in 1884.

It has been argued that projects of military advance in Asia were advocated and executed only by 'irresponsible' Russians or enthusiastic governors of provinces on the frontiers.[56] But there is sufficient evidence to the effect that the plans of expansion had full support of the Russian government. In a circular sent in 1864 to the consular officers abroad, Gorchakov, the Russian Chancellor, patiently explained the reasons for expansion. These included the usual explanations centring on the doctrines of necessity, power and spread of civilisation.[57] Motives behind Russia's expansion do not really concern us here. Russian historians have tended to argue that Russia's expansion in Central Asia began much before the British started building their empire in India, that Russia did not aim at conquering India and that the talk of threat to India was a smokescreen created by British officials and historians to disguise their own expansionist aims in India and beyond. As proof of this, they argue that the Russian authorities did not take advantage of discontent in India against British rule nor did they give assistance to discontented Indian rajas who approached them.[58]

Whether Russia actually planned to invade India is not the issue here. The real issue is that the British government thought that it might. Commenting on the period from 1884 to 1892, R.L. Greaves writes: 'No longer was Russia's approach regarded as a vague menace which might require attention some

day'.[59] But the truth was that the British government did not view the expansionist activity of Russia in the vicinity of India with nonchalance even during the first half of the nineteenth century, when Russian and British Empires were separated by thousands of miles of plains, deserts and mountains. In this context, the geo-location of Russia was of supreme importance. Across the Atlantic, Britain did not view the expansion of the United States of America with the same concern.[60] The Foreign Office, the War Office, the India Office and the government of India all watched Russia's activities carefully, sifted and exchanged information regarding the motives and military potentialities of Russia and co-ordinated different plans of action. Their anxieties and concerns can be followed in the records of the Committee of Imperial Defence. All defence proposals emanating from the government of India were reviewed by a joint committee of the India Office, the War Office and then submitted to the Prime Minister or the Cabinet.[61] Similarly, correspondence between the War Office and the Foreign Office, reports, newspaper cuttings and so on from St Petersburg, Paris, Berlin, Vienna, Constantinople and Tehran, to the extent they dwelt upon matters relating to the Near East, Far East, Africa and the rest of Asia, were sent to Calcutta.[62]

What sort of danger was envisaged from Russia's expansion in Central Asia? Few in authority at Calcutta or London seriously entertained the possibility of bundling away Russia to Europe. Some scholars have argued that the British feared that Russia would sweep the whole commerce of Asia, especially in cotton, into its grasp, adding that this was an area where Russia would not have to face competition from any European power.[63] But this argument does not carry much weight, for Russia simply did not have the means to become a menace to Britain's economic interests there.[64]

The reasons that made the British government view Russia's expansion with anxiety can broadly be summed up under four headings. First, the expansion of Russia towards the Mediterranean and the Persian Gulf was perceived as a threat to the most efficient routes to India – the Suez route and the overland route. Second, it was believed that continuous southeastward expansion of Russia in Central Asia could threaten Britain's position in India. The bellicose attitude of the press in both countries kept alive such fears not only in the minds of British statesmen but in the minds of statesmen all over Europe. Most Liberal politicians tended to dismiss as unimportant and unjustified the alarm felt by London and Calcutta on this account.[65] Historians have also tended to criticise the tendency to take an alarmist view of the situation. But the fear of invasion by Russia cannot be dismissed as a 'bogey'. In the tenth and eleventh centuries, Mahmud Ghazni and Mohammad Ghauri invaded India repeatedly from Ghazni and Ghauri, which were in the Afghan territory. Babur, who became the first Mughal ruler of Delhi in 1526, was a native of Fargana near Samarkand, which was occupied by Russia in 1868. In 1731 Nadir Shah of Persia had invaded Kars on the Black Sea, and eight years later he ransacked Delhi. In this background, the debate regarding Russian designs on India cannot be dismissed as a hypothetical debate centring on hypothetical fear. The possibility of

confrontation with Russia conditioned the perceptions and images of those responsible for determining Britain's strategic options and foreign policy decisions. Thirdly, Russia could unsettle the Raj merely by defeating a contingent of the British army in any frontier skirmish. The British were conscious that the Raj was based on the prestige of British arms. The Great Revolt of 1857 had destroyed the assumption, if there was any, that India was being ruled by consent. The government of India could not withdraw troops from India to fight on the north-west frontier for fear of rebellion in the rear.[66] Britain's defeat even on the remote frontier in a mere skirmish could create as Salisbury noted, 'a spasm of sedition' from 'one end of India to the other'. He added 'She will not try to conquer it. It will be enough for her if she can shatter our government and reduce India to anarchy.'[67]

Finally, by taking advantage of Britain's vulnerability on the Indian frontier, Russia could extract concessions from Britain elsewhere. European statesmen used phrases like 'the Achilles heel', 'Britain's feet of clay', '*le chorde sensible*' and so on to portray Britain's anxieties on this issue. In November 1899, Tsar Nicholas II wrote to his sister that it was in his power to change the course of the Boer War by sending a telegram ordering the Turkestan army to mobilise. 'The strongest fleet in the world can't prevent us from settling our scores with England precisely at her most vulnerable point', he wrote.[68] In 1908, the Kaiser wrote that the British had better realise that war with Germany means the loss of India.[69] To the Tsar, he wrote: 'Indian borders and Afghanistan are the only parts of the globe where the whole of her battleships are of no avail to England and where her guns are powerless to meet [an] invader. The loss of India is the death stroke to Great Britain'.[70] In a conversation with Sir Henry Drummond Wolff, the British Minister at Tehran, a Russian diplomat described the position succinctly:

> I perceive that all your foreign policy is based on India. You have held it [for] more than a century. As is natural you desire to retain it, and you are in the consistent belief that we wish to take it, your only motive in your Mediterranean policy, on the Suez Canal or at Constantinople is to protect India from Russia. I look on the Balkans as an Indian question.[71]

This feeling extended to the European people. A Russian businessman told one of the Rothschilds at Paris: 'We cannot fight England and her ships in the Chinese seas now, but we can help the Afridis against her'.[72]

Where could Britain exercise pressure on Russia to prevent it from expanding in the direction of the Indian Empire? The answer seemed to elude Britain's policy makers. Russia was a sprawling land power with a vast army. Britain's navy on the other hand, could not move on wheels. How was the whale to contain the bear's pace? Naval blockade could not inflict significant damage on the Russian economy. There was little hope of penetrating Russia's defences from the side of the Baltic Sea. Broadly speaking, two types of strategies were advocated. One school of strategists held that Russia was both accessible and

vulnerable on the Black Sea. They argued that only sending an expedition through the Black Sea and strike at Russia's underbelly in the Caucasus could restrict Russia's advance in Central Asia. It was believed that this army would get support from the non-Russian population of this region. This would prevent Russia from attacking the Indian frontier. This became known as the Black Sea strategy, sometimes referred to as the Crimean strategy.[73] In the summer of 1855, the Russians were greatly alarmed when the British army penetrated the Sea of Azov and occupied some coastal towns. In the 1860s Lord Lawrence, the Governor-General of India, had advised that in order to check Russia, offensive should be taken by Britain in the direction of the Black Sea. During the Russo-Turkish War, Disraeli sent the British fleet up to Besika Bay twice. During the 1880s Wolseley, the hero of Tel-el-Kebir, and Brackenbury, the Director of Military Intelligence, became staunch advocates of this strategy. But by the end of the century, this strategy seemed increasingly less feasible.[74] The other school advocated the strategy of meeting Russia beyond the northwest frontier of India in superior force. In the 1860s and 1870s its proponents were referred to as 'the Forward School'. From the mid-1880s, Frederick Sleigh Roberts, who occupied the position of Commander-in-Chief of India from 1885 to 1892 and of all British forces from 1901 to 1904, became a very vocal advocate of this strategy. He believed that Russia was assailable only through India and had to be stopped there. For this, massive reinforcements would be needed. London came to accept that resources would have to be mobilised for this purpose. Britain had never been a land power in the continental sense. The British army had had a threefold role: first, it served as a bastion of home defence; its second role was to join the European powers in wars on the continent; and its third role was overseas defence, in which gradually the defence of India was accepted as the primary task.[75]

In 1884 when Russia occupied Merv, a maximum of 36,000 men were available in Britain for reinforcing the army in India.[76] Gradually, the construction of railways by Russia in Central Asia increased the vulnerability of India. With this, the demand of the government of India for reinforcements steadily increased. In November 1904 this demand stood at 158,000 men, which Britain simply did not possess. This imposed a tremendous strain on all framers of strategy and diplomacy at London. In short, Russia was perceived as an enemy because it posed a threat to the security of the frontiers of India and the routes to India and hence to Britain's Great Power status. At the same time, Russia was a leading European power and was an intrinsic part of Europe's diplomatic scene. So the need to defend India against Russia was bound to affect Britain's relations with other European countries.

The phrase 'the Great Game' has been used to describe the Anglo-Russian setting in Central Asia in the nineteenth century. As with all such phrases, it has subsequently been used by different commentators in widely different senses, for different geographical areas, and for different periods.[77] At this time, this phrase definitely concerned British apprehensions regarding the safety and stability of the Indian Empire arising from the expansion of the Tsarist empire in Russia.

Like a game, it had excitements, calculations, tactical rules and a determination to win. But politics is not just a game. It is high art as well. In this sense, grasp of strategy and availability of means are very important. In this 'Game', from the British point of view, the purpose was negative – to prevent Russia from reaching the borders of India. There were no targets in terms of territory, which the British wanted. They wanted to guard the Raj. Even when some offensive moves were made, the purpose was not to expand but to ward off the possibility of having to face Russia there. A very important feature of this 'Game' was the consciousness of lack of means to face Russia in superior force on the northwest frontier of India. As we shall see, resources were calculated to the last man (even animal) available and to the last penny available. Still a winning combination eluded the British. This limited the choices available to the managers of British foreign policy in London and decisively influenced Britain's relations with all the European powers.

The Ottoman Empire

The Ottoman Empire was not included in the category of 'Great Powers' during this period, nor was it wholly a European state. Yet it has been taken up here because its formal jurisdiction extended over geographical positions which were of the deepest interest not only to Britain but to all European powers. In the first half of the nineteenth century, Britain had accorded the status of embassy to missions in only five capitals, and Constantinople was one of these.[78] This empire was situated on the confluence of two seas and three continents. In Europe its authority extended over the Balkan Peninsula. In Asia, the empire was comprised of four divisions: Anatolia (Asia Minor), Syria, Mesopotamia and Armenia. A considerable portion of the province of Armenia, which extended northward to the foot of the Caucasus and eastward to the Caspian Sea, had been taken by Russia under the Treaty of Adrianople signed in 1829. In Africa, the Ottomans had authority over Egypt and the Maghreb. Because of domination over these regions, the Ottoman government controlled major sea routes. It had the power to close or open the straits of Bosphorus and Dardanelles, which formed the highway between the Aegean Sea and the Black Sea. Its suzerainty was recognised on the shores of the Levant, on the coast along the Red Sea, at the head of the Persian Gulf and in the immediate neighbourhood of the Suez Canal.

Throughout the nineteenth century, a feeling permeated the ruling elite throughout Europe that the Ottoman Empire was on the verge of collapse or dismantlement. Whenever there was encroachment on areas of interest of the Great Powers, either through their own activities or indirectly because of questions arising out the nationalist aspirations of the peoples in the Balkans, a crisis situation developed. Attempts made by European powers to secure their vested interests in the event of the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire formed the basis of the Eastern Question. It brought European powers sometimes to

battlefields and sometimes to conference tables, leading to a series of public and secret international agreements.

The Ottoman Empire was not a territorial neighbour of Britain. Yet, throughout the nineteenth century, Britain worked to maintain it. The first British pronouncement on the desirability of keeping the Ottoman Empire intact dates from the period of the Napoleonic wars. In 1892 Salisbury wrote specifically: 'The protection of Constantinople from Russian conquest has been the turning point of the policy of this country for at least forty years, and to a certain extent for forty years before that.'[79] Why was Britain so keen to prevent Russia from establishing itself at Constantinople? Why did Britain want the Ottoman Empire to continue? Turkey had been a trading partner since the sixteenth century. There were many who feared that the advantageous position that Russia would acquire at Constantinople would enable it to use the Turkish economy for its own purposes. One estimate made in 1877 indicated that if British trade were excluded from European Turkey, the loss would be 12 million pounds. But the economic stake of Britain in the Ottoman Empire could be described as negligible. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, in order to bolster Britain's presence, when the government made efforts to build up an economic stake in the Ottoman Empire, it found it difficult to tempt reluctant British businessmen into making investments there. The government decided to bear the burden itself. But even this did not work because funds were not available.[80] The Foreign Office was forced to fall back on energetic diplomacy. The economic stakes of Russia in this region were negligible. In fact, Russia was unique amongst the Great Powers in that even by 1917 it had no capital investments, railway interests or concessions in the Ottoman Empire.[81] The reason for Britain's abiding interest in the Ottoman Empire was that all short routes to the East passed through this region. The Ottomans seemed to be the best occupiers here because they were likely to be the most amenable to British influence. The collapse or disintegration of this empire into smaller political units was likely to establish the influence of Russia there. Britain was not ready to place its communication with India at the mercy of Russia, a power that was expanding in Central Asia and was sure to acquire a navy.[82]

It was constantly assumed, not only in London but in all European capitals, that maintenance of the territorial integrity of the Ottoman Empire was of special interest to Britain. Britain's support was manifested most strongly during the Mehmat Ali Crisis in 1839–40, the Crimean War in 1854–6, the Russo-Turkish War in 1877–8 and the Bulgarian Crisis in 1885–7. Britain despatched its most able diplomats to Constantinople to ensure that the affairs of this region were settled in Britain's favour.[83] At London, the interests involved were considered so vital that Britain was ready to maintain the autocratic empire even though it involved denying the rights of self-government, self-determination and nationhood to the people in the Balkans, despite Britain's preferred commitment to liberal ideals and values. In fact, soon after the Russo-Turkish War started, the British Foreign Office spelled out Britain's interests in the Ottoman Empire unequivocally in a despatch to the Russian ambassador:

> Should the war now in progress unfortunately spread, interests may be imperilled which they are equally bound and determined to defend…the most prominent of those interests are the…necessity of keeping open…the communication between Europe and the east by the Suez Canal. An attempt to blockade or otherwise to interfere with the Canal or its approaches would be regarded by them as a menace to India, and as a grave injury to the commerce of the world…The mercantile and financial interests of European nations are also so largely involved in Egypt that an attack on that country, or its occupation, even temporary, for purposes of war, could scarcely be regarded with unconcern by the neutral Powers, certainly not by England. The vast importance of Constantinople, whether in a military, a political, or a commercial point of view, is too well understood to require explanation…The existing arrangements made under European sanction which regulate the navigation of the Bosphorus and Dardanelles appear to them wise and salutary.[84]

Britain also tried to assist the Ottomans in carrying out internal reforms in different provinces so as to help create a contented population. Joseph Heller comments that in this respect Britain's goals were incompatible; Britain was claiming to maintain the independence of the Ottomans and was, at the same time, insisting that the empire be reformed from within.[85] The latter amounted to denial of independence. But it would be well to point out here that Britain's goal was not to work either for independence or integrity of the Ottoman Empire *per se*. Its purpose was to prevent Russia from moving in, and for this purpose it wanted to ensure that the Turks were in a strong position to resist Russia's penetration.

Continuation of the Ottoman Empire served another purpose as well. The Ottoman ruler was not just the Sultan of Turkey but also the *khalifa*, the religious leader of the Muslims. Muslims formed about 15 per cent of the population of the Indian Empire. There was a great deal of talk about the British Empire being the greatest Muslim power in the world. The British could ensure the loyalty of Muslims by supporting their *khalifa*. Even during the French Revolutionary Wars, when Tipu Sultan, the ruler of Mysore, had tried to befriend the French, the government of India had appealed to the Ottoman Ruler, as head of Islam, to ask Tipu Sultan to desist from anti-British activities.[86] During the Crimean War, in order to win over Muslims in India the British government tried to show off its association with the Ottomans and the government of India wished that the British army would obtain some spectacular success.[87] During the Russo-Turkish War in 1877–8, it was accepted that the occupation of Constantinople by Russia would have adverse effects on the loyalty of Muslim subjects in particular and all Indians in general. When this question was discussed in 1892, Salisbury commented: 'I need not dwell upon the effect which the Russian possession of Constantinople would have upon our position in India, which is so largely dependent on prestige'.[88] Even rumours about the success of Russia could be harmful. Continuance of the Raj depended

not so much on British soldiers or even sailors but on the fear and awe which the British commanded in India.

Defending the frontiers of India

In the north, the Indian Empire had a long land frontier extending in a half circle touching, from east to west, Burma, Tibet, China, the Central Asian khanates, Afghanistan and Persia. In the south it had an extensive seacoast. Given Britain's naval predominance, no envious rival could threaten British hegemony in the Indian Ocean. Two small squadrons – often less than a dozen sloops and frigates each, with an occasional ship of the line – were sufficient to keep most of the Indian Ocean 'out of bounds' to intruders.[89] Even the land frontier was insulated for hundreds of miles in the north by the Himalayas – the highest mountain barrier in the world – and by desert in the west. The Indian subcontinent had been invaded mostly from the northwest. Inside India, the French presence at Pondicherry and Portuguese presence in Goa, Daman and Diu did not even cause anxiety.

Once the British were entrenched in India, the British government did not perceive any threat from the ambitions or activities of any state in the vicinity of India. It perceived danger to its Indian Empire from all its continental rivals at different times. The British government made all efforts to ensure that the Great Powers of Europe kept their hands not just off their empire in India but off all the states situated in the vicinity of India. In 1902 Lord Lansdowne, the Foreign Secretary, who had extensive experience of strategic and diplomatic issues because he had been ambassador at Rome, Viceroy of India (1888–94) and Secretary for War (1895–1900), defined this policy:

> it has…been one of our principal objects to encourage and strengthen the states lying outside the frontier of our Indian empire, with the hope that we should find in them *an intervening zone sufficient to prevent direct contact between the dominions of Great Britain and those of other great military Powers*. We could not however maintain this policy if in any particular instance we should find that one of these intervening states was being crushed out of national existence, and falling practically under the complete domination of any other power.[90]

The government of India made efforts to create territorial buffers from one end of India to the other. The coastal region of the Shan State in Burma was annexed after two wars in 1823–6 and 1852. The entire kingdom was annexed in 1886 when a threat was seen from the activities of the French government in South-East Asia. An expedition was sent to Tibet in 1903. Efforts were made to control the Central Asian khanates like Chitral, Gilgit and Hunza. Events in Afghanistan were very closely watched. An expedition was sent to Persia in 1856. Germany's activities in Batum and in the direction of Baghdad were closely watched. Though great expanse of desert and mountains separated the Indian

Empire from Russian possessions, the British government monitored every move made by Russia in the direction of India.[91] All these negotiations were conducted and bargains were struck in complete indifference to the wishes of the governments or natives of these places.

It was most important to defend the northwest frontier of India. India had been invaded from this direction many a time. But, in the nineteenth century, the government of India did not have to face any threat from the ambitions of the Shah of Persia or the Amir of Afghanistan. Disraeli dismissed these states as 'broken reeds', while Salisbury described them as 'empty sacks unable to stand on their own'.[92] It was the activities of the Russians from beyond these states that caused anxiety. For this reason the attitude of the rulers in these two states acquired crucial importance. If these states were strong, independent and friendly, then they could obstruct Russia's designs. On the other hand, if their rulers were favourably disposed towards Russia, an invasion of India was not outside the bounds of practical possibility.

Persia was a vast country. But most of it was a desert, and in the nineteenth century its mineral resources still lay dormant.[93] There was no co-terminous frontier between Persia and British possessions in India until the Baluch chiefs, who dominated the area between Sind and Persia, were brought under British control in the 1870s.[94] To British statesmen, it seemed that Russia was in a more favourable position in this region. Russia had brought the area around the Caspian Sea under its control and was in a position to invade Persia from the north. The British could not offer military assistance to the Persian government in such an eventuality because Baluchistan, the region to the extreme west of the Indian Empire, was a desert area and opened on the Persian side in Siestan, which was also a desert.[95] Moreover, because of geographical proximity, Russia could occupy Tehran before any help could be sent. Salisbury wrote: 'Regions in which Russian encroachments are likely to be made lie wholly beyond the reach of any material assistance which HMG could furnish to the Persian government'.[96]

In this situation, only a friendly and strong Persia could stem the tide of Russia's expansion. The comparative stability of politics and society there, together with the fact that this position was internationally recognised, provided the right conditions. Britain, France, Germany, Austria, Italy, Holland and Belgium maintained diplomatic missions at Tehran. Towards the closing years of the nineteenth century, the British government tried to develop Persia as a client state.[97] The British had a long established commercial presence in the Persian Gulf dating back to the beginning of the nineteenth century. Moreover, Nasir-ud-din, the Shah of Persia from 1848 to 1896, also watched Russia's activities with unease and wanted to strengthen his state. In this situation, the Foreign Office tried to take advantage of the Shah's need for capital. During the late 1880s, the Imperial Bank of Persia was formed to act as a conduit for British capital. But the government failed to tempt British investors to invest in Persia. Thus, the efforts of the British Foreign Office to strengthen its position in Tehran through sterling diplomacy failed.[98] Towards the end of the century, when

Russia conquered Khorasan on the northeast of Persia, the situation seemed grimmer. Thereafter, the British government directed its efforts towards preventing Russia from extending its influence in Seistan.[99] The question of Seistan thus became very important. It occurs in all discussions during this period.

R.L. Greaves speaks of the dual significance of Persia for Britain: the relationship to India and its relationship to Russia.[100] But there was no duality involved. Britain perceived danger to its Indian Empire from Russia and Persia became relevant because it lay en route. This was implicit in Salisbury's view that 'were it not for our possessing India, we should trouble ourselves but little about Persia',[101] and in the comment of Hamilton: 'The more you investigate the sources of our interest in Persia the clearer it becomes that they are almost exclusively Indian.'[102] Until 1859, the control of the legation at Tehran was under the India Office. Thereafter, it was placed directly under the Foreign Office. A substantial part of the cost of this establishment was paid out of the revenues of India.[103] The people of India did not feel threatened by Russia. The government of India too was a subordinate government. It could be left out completely in determining the relations with Persia or Russia, as indeed happened at the time of forming the Anglo-Russian entente in 1907.[104]

Afghanistan was a landlocked country with ill-defined frontiers, touching by the mid-nineteenth century Persia, the Indian Empire and many territories under tribal chiefs, some independent and some quasi-independent. The British government kept a watchful eye on this region even before the Indian Empire reached the Hindu Kush in the 1840s. In 1836, when a Russian envoy appeared in Kabul, the British invaded Afghanistan with a view to installing a friendlier ruler. The expedition resulted in bloody failure mainly because of the intense anti-foreign feelings of the Afghans.[105] Thereafter, the government of India adopted a policy of deliberate aloofness. In 1856, when the Shah of Persia attempted to gain control over Herat, Britain intervened militarily to prevent him from doing so. At this stage, a treaty of friendship was signed with the Amir of Afghanistan.

A new phase in Anglo-Afghan relations began in the 1860s following two important developments. In 1863, Dost Mohammad, who had become Amir of Afghanistan in 1842 after the First Afghan War, died. His death was followed by a bitter and prolonged war of succession between his sixteen sons. Second, after decades of virtual inactivity, Russia resumed its policy of expansion in Central Asia. Two related issues emerged as a result of these developments. First, how was Britain to deal with the situation arising out of the expansion of Russia in Central Asia? Second, what kind of relations should Britain establish with Afghanistan? This led to a prolonged and acrimonious controversy over the best means of guarding the Raj. Two schools of thought emerged, the Closed Border School and the Forward School. The debate between them centred on the questions as to where, by whom and how Russian advances towards India should be checked.

John Lawrence, the Viceroy and Governor-General of India from 1864 to 1869, a period that saw a bloody war in Afghanistan, became the high priest of

the Closed Border School.[106] Many statesmen in Britain and India supported him, among them Viceroys Mayo and Northbrook, Sir Charles Wood, India Secretary (1859–60) and Lord Privy Seal (1870–4), and Lord Derby, India Secretary (1858–9) and Foreign Secretary (1874–8). The policy that they advocated was both hailed by supporters and denounced by their opponents in the phrase 'masterly inactivity'. The keynote of their policy was that the British should not interfere in the internal affairs of Afghanistan. But such a policy was to be based on the precondition that Russia should also not interfere. They believed that only a settlement between London and St Petersburg could solve the problem. In case a war had to be fought, they wanted to fight Russia 'all over the world', in the direction of the Mediterranean or the Black Sea, as circumstances of the time might warrant.

The proponents of the 'Forward School', on the other hand, held that Russia's expansion towards the north-west frontier of the Indian Empire had to be stalled by using the Kabul–Kandahar line as outworks of the Raj. They believed that Russia's policies in Central Asia were unpredictable because Russia's War Ministry and local military commanders enjoyed considerable freedom.[107] They wanted the government of India to involve itself closely in Afghan politics and to conclude an offensive and defensive alliance with the ruler of Afghanistan. They also wanted the government of India to station a British agent in Afghanistan. The chief proponents of the 'Forward School' were Sir H.C. Rawlinson, Sir Henry Bartle Frere, Sir Robert Montgomery and Sir John W. Kaye.[108] Rawlinson had first hand experience of the geography and politics of Persia, Afghanistan, Arabia and Mesopotamia. Frere had been the Chief Commissioner of Sind (1850–9) and Governor of Bombay (1862–7). Montgomery had been Lieutenant Governor of Punjab between 1859 and 1865, while Kaye was the Secretary in the Political and Secret Department of the India Office. The first three entered the India Office within a year of each other during 1867–8. This foursome shared similar ideas about the ways of defending the Indian Empire and became what J.L. Duthie describes as the 'undetected cabal within the India Office during Gladstone's first ministry'.[109] Though the assumptions and suggestions varied from person to person, they all hawked a more forceful policy towards Russia. Their opponents described them as advocates of 'mischievous' activity. Rawlinson even suggested that British presence in Persia should be used for this purpose. He wished to create a 'military nucleus' in Persia by raising a 5,000–10,000 men force of Persian soldiery, 'armed, clothed, fed, disciplined and commanded by British officers'.[110] They also believed that Britain simply did not have the resources to fight Russia 'all over the world'.

As far as Afghanistan was concerned, during the war of succession following the death of Dost Mohammad in 1863, John Lawrence, who was a bitter opponent of 'forward' ideas, maintained an attitude of strict and scrupulous neutrality.[111] He accorded friendly recognition to successive occupants of the throne in Kabul. 'If you wish to be friends with Afghanistan, beware of meddling in their internecine quarrels', advised Lawrence.[112] The Liberal

government at London agreed. In case Russia intervened, Lawrence believed, an offensive should be taken from England in other parts of the world. By 1868, Sher Ali, one of the claimants to the Afghan throne, had toppled all his rivals and became the Amir. He did not show hostility towards the British. Yet, as long as he ruled Afghanistan, he remained conscious that he did not owe his position to British power. He was uneasy also about the effect of expansionist policies of two European powers on the future of his state. He often described his country as an earthen vessel between the two wheels of Russian and British imperialism. The two viceroys who succeeded Lawrence – Mayo and Northbrook – continued the policy of non-intervention. The Amir made efforts to get recognition for himself and his descendants from the British government, and also assurances of support in the case of a Russian invasion. But he stoutly refused to accept a British Resident at Kabul, pleading that he could not take responsibility for the latter's security.[113]

Meanwhile, in 1869, negotiations started between London and St Petersburg – the Clarendon–Gorchakov talks – with a view to creating a neutral zone between the two in Central Asia. These continued until January 1873 when they ended without any formal exchange of notes. Russia indicated that it considered Afghanistan outside of its sphere of influence and concluded that Russia would be left a free hand elsewhere in Central Asia. The government of India asked the Foreign Office to ensure that Roshan and Shignan, lying towards the north-west of Afghanistan, be recognised as Afghan possessions. But in the final despatch to St Petersburg, the Foreign Office used the word 'claim' repeatedly and did not refer to the Amir's sovereignty over these territories. At the same time, the Amir was not called upon to vacate this territory and he continued to govern it.[114] Both these issues created problems later.

In mid-1873, Russia sent its army towards Merv and occupied Khiva. This re-opened the debate between the protagonists of the two schools. Thereafter, the foremost advocates of the Closed Border School became 'mervous'[115] about the empire's vulnerability. Even Northbrook began to advocate that the views of 'Rawlinson and Company' be given serious consideration.[116] He suggested that Britain should give an unconditional guarantee of defence of Afghanistan in return for the Amir agreeing to the stationing of a Resident in Kabul and surrendering control over foreign affairs to the British.[117] But Gladstone's government refused to take any such step.

Guarding the routes to India

Given the distance of 11,730 nautical miles between London and Calcutta via the Cape and some 8,000 nautical miles via the Suez, control over India could be maintained only if there could be a guarantee of uninterrupted communications. The British government showed single-minded determination to ensure control over all lines of communications between London and Calcutta. Given Britain's dependence on seaborne trade and the determination to maintain the Indian Empire, all sea lanes were, for Britain, not mere means of communica-

tion but the very arteries for sustaining its empire and its economy. 'Did our possession of India necessitate our grasping at every avenue of approach to it?' Palmerston is reported to have asked and then retorted, 'Because I have a house in York and a house in London, must I own all the Innes on the way'.[118] Yet, this is precisely what the British government did. As we shall see, the British government took pains to establish control over Gibraltar, Malta, the Ionian islands and Cyprus from one end of the Mediterranean to the other, then over the Cape of Good Hope, Zanzibar, Mauritius, Aden, Seychelles, Colombo, Rangoon and Singapore in the Indian Ocean. Together with control over Bombay, Madras and Calcutta, these bases hung fairly evenly on the rim of the ocean like beads on a chain.

Before the development of aeroplanes, there were two routes for getting from London to Bombay and Calcutta. The first – the long, slow and safe way – was around Africa via the Cape of Good Hope and across the Indian Ocean. It was used for transporting passengers and goods. One advantage of this long route was that it was through the open oceans and was comparatively free from interference by other powers. The other was the short route. Until the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 one had to travel by ship through the Mediterranean Sea, then overland through the Isthmus of Suez in Egypt into the Red Sea, or through Syria and Mesopotamia into the Persian Gulf. These were known also as 'overland routes'. These were high-cost routes, though the time taken was less than half the time taken over the long route. Until the middle of the nineteenth century these were used primarily for mail. The overland route through Egypt was opened up for passengers in the 1830s. The passengers sailed to Alexandria, went overland to Suez and then took another ship for Bombay or Calcutta.[119] Simultaneously, the alternative of travelling from Alexanderatta via Aleppo in the Levant, then through Mesopotamia to Basra and onward to Bombay was also seriously explored. This became known as 'the alternate route'. This route had been used extensively for trade with the Ottoman Empire during the Mughal period.

The British government guarded its interests along all these routes with a vengeance. Britain considered itself to be the immediate neighbour of all countries that had a coastline along these routes and watched their relations with other countries. To take up the long route first, the Cape of Good Hope, situated halfway between Europe and India, was the only port on the route to India which was visited regularly by ships in the early nineteenth century. The advantages of obtaining and holding the Cape had been urged as early as the time of the American Revolution. In October 1781, the directors of the English East India Company wrote that 'the Power possessing the Cape of Good Hope has the key to and from the East Indies, appears to us to be self-evident and unquestionable'.[120] By the end of the eighteenth century, travellers and official surveyors were publishing books and pamphlets on the subject.[121] By the early nineteenth century, phrases such as 'key to the Indian Ocean', 'Master of Asia' and 'the Gibraltar of India' had become a part of the lexicon of colonial and company officials with or without a military background.[122] During the

Napoleonic wars, the British government established its control over the Cape of Good Hope. Other European powers accepted this under the Vienna Settlement of 1815. A campaign was simultaneously inaugurated to 'regenerate' the area around the Cape so as to generate resources for its upkeep. But economically, the Cape colony remained a liability.[123] This, however, did not make the British government consider the idea of relinquishing its hold. This route remained important even after the Suez Canal was opened. During the mid-1890s when South Africa became 'the real running sore' in Anglo-German relations, Kimberley, the Foreign Secretary, repeatedly warned Berlin that South Africa was 'perhaps the most vital interest of Great Britain because by the possession of it communication with India was assured…[it was] of even greater importance to England than Malta or Gibraltar'.[124]

The Mediterranean was the most crucial link in the direct route to the East. Britain would have taken an interest in this region in any case because of its naval and commercial interests. But the desire to maintain its hold over India made it imperative to keep a vigilant eye on this area. France's best naval base, Toulon, was situated in the western Mediterranean. Here the French fleet could enter the Atlantic Ocean and threaten the long route or enter the English Channel. The threat was magnified with the establishment of French control in the Maghreb from 1830. But, given Britain's control over Gibraltar and naval supremacy, the Admiralty was confident of handling any eventuality in this region. It was the eastern Mediterranean, which became a crucial theatre for British strategists. Here, two areas of crucial importance were the regions around the straits of Bosphorus and Dardanelles, and the Suez. Britain considered this area so important that Gerald Graham comments that 'Britain was prepared in a pinch to fight both France and Russia to keep her Mediteranean corridor intact'.[125] Britain also wanted to ensure that its own warships had the right to enter the Straits because this seemed to be the only area from where Britain could invade Russia so as to prevent it from expanding towards the north-west of India. In 1895 the Director of Military Intelligence noted:

> The interests of the empire, India, and all Britain's eastern possessions required, that as long as Britain can keep it so, Russia should be vulnerable through the Black Sea – to secure this, the Dardanelles and Bosphorus must either be kept unarmed, or in the hands of Russia's foes.[126]

According to the accepted principles of the time, the Ottomans had full sovereignty over the entire coast. By international agreement, the straits were open to all commercial ships and closed to all non-Turkish warships in time of peace. Russia wanted the straits to remain closed to warships of all other powers so as to have a lock and chain at the Dardanelles for the protection of its shores. Moreover, Russia wanted to reach the Mediterranean, and for this control over the straits seemed necessary. Early in 1900 the Russian Chancellor, reviewing Russia's foreign policy prospects, agreed with the War Minister that seizure of the Bosphorus was Russia's most important task in the twentieth century.[127]

Britain assumed that Russia would somehow establish formidable naval power in the Black Sea and, with control over the straits, the Black Sea would become a Russian lake. Yet, both London and St Petersburg remained concerned about the issue of passage of warships through the straits. But two factors should be mentioned which make the attitude of both the powers seem incongruous. One was that Russia started the construction of its Black Sea Fleet only in 1883, and that at a very slow speed. At least some British statesmen believed that Russia had no naval history, no maritime population and no resources.[128] Second, under various agreements, the task of regulating the entry or exit of warships through the straits was assigned to the Ottoman government. But it is doubtful if it had the necessary power to regulate this traffic.

Under the Straits Convention of 1841, the principle of the closure of the straits, hitherto applied to entry into the Black Sea, was equally extended to exit from it. Russia was thus shut off from sending its non-existent fleet into the Mediterranean. During 1854–6, Britain participated in the Crimean War when Russia seemed to pose a threat to the independence of the Turkish Empire. Under the Treaty of Paris, concluded after this war, Russia was prevented from either building fortifications or a fleet in the Black Sea. Russia found this attempt at compulsory disarmament very humiliating. Russia used the opportunity created by the Franco-Prussian War to declare that it would no longer be bound by 'the Black Sea Clauses' of the Treaty of Paris. Britain refused to let the matter go. Odo Russel, Foreign Secretary in Gladstone's government, told Bismarck in November 1870 that Britain would go to war on this issue.[129] Britain did appear adamant; at least, Bismarck believed that Britain would go to war on this issue.[130] Russia did not in fact have warships in the Black Sea, but Russia was pegging out claims for the future. For the same reason, Britain did not want to take any risk. Finally, the matter was referred to a conference of European powers, held in London. On the face of it, the purpose was to observe the moral imperative that a treaty signed at an international conference should be changed only at another conference rather than by unilateral action. The Treaty of London, signed in 1871, did revise the Treaty of Paris so as to accommodate Russia's demand. But it admitted, for the first time, the principle that foreign navies might enter the straits if the Sultan judged it necessary for safeguarding the clauses of the Treaty of Paris. Thus the principle of the closure of the straits was reversed to Russia's disadvantage.[131]

On the short routes to India, to the east of the Eastern Mediterranean lay the Suez isthmus which was regarded as the master key to all trading nations. Ever since Napoleon put his foot on Egypt, all British governments took it for granted that any attempt by France to establish control over Egypt would compel Britain to assume the heaviest of liabilities in foreign policy. In the 1830s, Mehmet Ali, the Pasha of Egypt, conquered Syria and Mesopotamia. This in itself might not have alarmed the British government. But there were other apprehensions. Mehmet Ali's designs were supported by the French government. Moreover, Mehmet Ali could co-operate with Russia with the aim of partitioning Persia. In 1839, when attempts made by the Ottoman government to get back these

provinces failed, Palmerston, the energetic British prime minister, decided to intervene. He concluded the Treaty of London with Russia, Austria and Prussia and sent the British navy 'to chuck' Mehmet Ali into the Nile.[132] He stated his reason unequivocally: 'The mistress of India cannot permit France to be mistress directly or indirectly of the road to her Indian dominions'.[133] This, comments H.L. Hoskins, was equivalent to stating a British doctrine of paramount interest in those portions of the Ottoman Empire through which ran the natural routes to the East.[134]

In France, under Napoleon III, de Lesseps put forward plans for the construction of a canal through the Isthmus of Suez that would enable the ships to travel from the Mediterranean Sea to the Arabian Sea.[135] Britain was likely to, and eventually did, become the major user of the canal, but Palmerston fiercely opposed the construction of the canal, and in this he enjoyed full support from his countrymen. He was uncompromising in his opposition, as he said in 1851: 'It shall not be made, it cannot be made, it was not to be made, but if it were made, there would be a war between France and England for the possession of Egypt'.[136] What were the reasons for such a vitriolic posture? H.E. Chamberlain says that 'the good reason' was that 'while the Royal Navy could command the high seas, it could not control a "ditch" through someone else's territory'.[137] In forwarding this argument, sufficient weight is not attached to the geographical location of the Isthmus and Britain's single-minded determination to prevent any European power from entrenching itself anywhere on any of the routes to India. Palmerston viewed the whole issue in strategic terms, not commercial. He did not believe that de Lesseps would overcome the natural obstacle to the construction of the canal. But he definitely objected even to the digging of the ditch, fearing that it would prevent the Ottomans from sending an army to Egypt to re-establish their authority in case there was ever any need. In the 1830s Mehmet Ali, had sent his army in the opposite direction. The major objection, however, was that the Isthmus of Suez provided an excellent bulwark against encroachment, by any European power, especially the French, into the Indian Ocean. A canal across the Isthmus of Suez, he feared, would increase the influence of France from the Levant to the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean. He feared that in the event of outbreak of any war, such a canal would enable France to send its warships from Toulon to the Indian Ocean on this interior line of communication in five weeks, as against ten weeks taken by British warships from Portsmouth via the Cape.[138] Britons increasingly remembered the French wars, especially the Egyptian expedition of 1798. Besides, since 1830, France had improved its army faster than any other European power by developing improved artillery. The French had also been training the army of Mehmet Ali in Egypt and that of Ranjit Singh, the Maharaja of Punjab, in the Indian subcontinent. The situation seemed grim enough to cause invasion scares in 1844 and 1852.[139] Palmerston believed that the Canal would permanently destroy the insularity of India and would become a lance in the hand of France to pierce the armour of Britain. France could seize the canal, close it to British ships, capture Aden and Mauritius and reach the Malabar Coast. The question

of ensuring the defence of the Indian Empire was obviously considered more important than commercial gains flowing from the availability of a shorter sea route to India.

By 1869, the Suez Canal, twenty-four feet deep and ninety-eight miles long, was ready. In Britain, its completion was viewed as 'a national disaster'.[140] Neither the French nor the Khedive of Egypt spared Britain. The decoration at Port Said everywhere studiously excluded British flags. But Gladstone's government could not ignore its strategic implications. In 1870 his government appointed a committee of the Cabinet to consider how far the Suez Canal ought to be regarded as available during wars for the transport of men and stores to India.[141] As is well known, in 1875 Disraeli was able to purchase a majority of the shares of the Suez Canal Company. In 1882, when the Liberals were once again in power under Gladstone, Egypt was 'occupied temporarily'. Within less than a decade, the British decided not only to stay on in Egypt but also discovered 'vital' interests in the middle of tropical Africa. These developments have been taken up in the chapters that follow. While opposing the construction of the Suez Canal, Palmerston made efforts to improve the overland route by laying railway lines from Alexandria to Suez. This offered the advantage of rapid communication and, at the same time, of preserving the isthmian barrier. It was the French who, fearing that it would give a say to Britain in Egyptian affairs, opposed the project. Nevertheless, the line was commenced in 1851. By 1857 the line from Alexandria to Cairo was ready.[142] The railway line over the remaining twenty-five miles to Suez was laid subsequently.

To the east of the Isthmus lay the Red Sea. The desire to have control over the entire route made the British government take interest in this lap of the route as well. Mehmet Ali's conquests in Arabia had drawn the attention of the British government to the need to rivet its position in this area. An expedition was sent to Aden in southern Arabia and this port was occupied in January 1839. The absence of any strong power on the shores of the Red Sea made Palmerston take interest in the ancient kingdom of Abyssinia (now Ethiopia) in the African horn on the western shores of the Red Sea. In 1847 he appointed a consul for Abyssinia with a view to protecting the sea route to India and establishing a Westernised client state there.[143] In 1867, an expedition was sent to Abyssinia apparently to rescue the British mission there. But it was the country's geographical location on the route to India which made Britain take such interest there.

The British government did not ignore even the 'alternative route' via Syria and Mesopotamia. It was believed that at the height of the south-west monsoon, when the weather caused difficulties for ships in the Red Sea and the Arabian Sea, the Persian Gulf could be used. The British, therefore, sought monopoly over the Gulf and the littoral areas flanking it to the north, the south and the west. By the 1870s, the idea of a Baghdad railway extending to the Persian Gulf, or all the way to India, was slowly but surely evolving. During the summer of 1870, a number of surveys for a possible railway line were carried on in the mountains of the Syrian hinterland, and in July 1871, a Select Committee of the House was appointed 'to examine and report upon the whole subject of railway

communications between the Mediterranean, the Black Sea and the Persian Gulf.[144] The subject was taken up not because of commercial considerations but because it would 'strengthen our hold on India'.[145] But at the turn of the century when Germany began plans for a Berlin–Baghdad railway, the project was seen as a threat to the security of the Indian Empire.

Britain's foreign policy and the government of India

The British Empire in India was governed as a distinct unit. It was too massive ever to fall under the aegis of the Colonial Office. Until 1858, it was governed through the East India Company. It was a chartered company and the charter of the company came for renewal before the British government every twenty years. The real power lay with the Board of Control, which was an organ of the British government. The company's chief officer in India was the Governor-General. After the Revolt of 1857–8, the charter of the company was revoked and territories and property of the East India Company were taken over by the British government. It appointed the head of the Indian Empire, who was thereafter called the viceroy (the direct representative of British king or queen) and the Governor-General of India. In Britain, a new cabinet position was created, that of Secretary of State for India.[146] He was made responsible for matters relating to the Indian Empire. Like all ministers, he was assisted by a parliamentary under-secretary and a permanent under-secretary and also by a special body called 'The Council of India'.

The Council of India was an advisory body and consisted mainly of retired Anglo-Indian administrators.[147] Its members had the right to study, evaluate and help formulate despatches between India and Britain. It also possessed financial sanction on loans and expenditure. But in matters relating to declaration of war, conclusion of peace or negotiating with Asian states and rulers, the Secretary of State was not bound to solicit its advice. Its opinion was valued because its members were experts having first-hand knowledge of India. The members of the Political Committee of the India Council had access to secret papers and often exercised more influence than others. The actual influence of the India Council varied from time to time, depending on the expertise and personalities of the members or the inclinations of the current Secretary of State. It could be very influential when the policies it advocated chimed with the policies of the government of the time as happened during the late 1870s.[148] It is notable that some policy makers had intimate knowledge of matters relating to British diplomacy as well as India because of the top positions they had occupied. At least two Foreign Ministers of Britain had first hand experience of Indian affairs. Salisbury, who remained in charge of foreign affairs for some twelve years, had been the India Secretary twice, during 1867 and 1874–8. Similarly, Lansdowne, who conducted foreign affairs during the crucial period from 1900 to 1905, had been the Governor-General of India from 1888 to 1894. Conversely, two of the Governors-General had been closely associated with diplomacy: Dufferin had been ambassador at Constantinople and then at St Petersburg, while Charles

Hardinge had been permanent under-secretary at Whitehall and then ambassador at St Petersburg. This created space for appreciation of Britain's interests *vis-à-vis* India at the top level.

In the Indian Empire, about 60 per cent of territory was directly under the charge of the Viceroy and Governor-General of India. Towards the end of the nineteenth century this territory was divided into eight provinces headed by governors or chief commissioners. In the rest of India, there were over 550 states, which were called the 'Native States' or the 'Princely States'. Each of these was nominally under an Indian head of state who recognised British sovereignty, which was variously defined at various times. The actual authority of the British rested on their demonstrated capacity for military intervention. The British government of India controlled these states through officials called residents, who were placed in the courts of these 'native' states.

Generations of historians have argued that the strategic and political needs of the British in Europe were different from, and occasionally in conflict with, those of India and that the government of India enjoyed considerable liberty of action especially in determining relations with other states in Asia. Phillip Darby, for instance, points out that 'India was an empire in its own right, and pursued an imperial policy within its own sphere'.[149] Three types of explanations are advanced in this connection. First, the distance between Britain and India enabled the government of India to act in its own way either by calculated design or inadvertently. Secondly, 'the man on the spot' tended to act in such ways as not to leave much choice to the authorities at London.[150] Even the introduction of telegraphic communication, it is held, did not make much of a difference in this respect. Finally, it is argued, that the execution of policies in any case lay with the government at Calcutta, and that the government of India maintained direct relations with the states in the neighbourhood such as Afghanistan, Tibet, Burma, Persia and the states in the Persian Gulf region.[151]

In practice, however, the government of India could enjoy only limited power. It was a subordinate government, an arm of the government at London. The mere hierarchy of power ensured that in case of differences, views of the government at London would prevail.[152] Moreover, once it was recognised that Britain would cease to be a world power if it ceased to possess India, the question of retaining the Raj became one of national interest. This created essential unity of purpose and harmony between the authorities in London and Calcutta/Delhi. For this purpose, the Foreign Office, the India Office, the War Office, the government of India and the Committee of Imperial Defence carefully and systematically sifted and exchanged opinions and information regarding Russia's plans, actions and military potentialities. The government of India was always consulted. All defence proposals emanating from India were reviewed by a joint committee of the India Office and War Office and then submitted to the Prime Minister and, after 1902, to the Committee of Imperial Defence. But, in the end, it was the decision of the government at London that prevailed. This happened in decisions on Cyprus in 1878, Tibet in 1903 and the Anglo-Russian entente in 1907. It might be added that though the opinion of

the government of India was often set aside with impunity, every conceivable expense relating to foreign policy and strategic matters was paid out of the revenues from India.[153]

Britons did not perceive any threat to the security of their homeland during the last decades of the nineteenth century. They wanted to retain their status as a great power, for which maintenance of the empire was very important. In this empire, India had an overwhelming presence. From the time parts of India passed under the British, control over the Indian Empire was considered non-negotiable. Given the distance between Britain and India, it was as important to control the routes to India. The need to safeguard the frontiers of India and the routes thereto became an unquestioned axiom of British foreign policy. Imperial commitments, however, did not eliminate the importance of European connections. If the situation in Europe became unfavourable, it would have been difficult to keep busy in distant lands. And whenever activities of the European powers affected Britain's Indian connection, relations with these powers were bound to be affected. In the chapters that follow, an attempt has been made to analyse the subtleties of the connections that existed between Britain and the European states with a view to analysing the pressures imposed on British foreign policy by the need to guard their Koh-i-noor.

2 Flaunting the Indian Empire, 1874–80

In the early 1870s, when the Liberals were in power, a feeling was abroad that Britain was not playing the role commensurate with its standing in the world. The 'failure' to mediate in the Franco-Prussian War, to prevent Russia's denunciation of the Black Sea clauses and to modify the results of the *Alabama* arbitration[1] all appeared to be instances of Britain's spineless policies, self-effacement or passivity. The grant of responsible government to the Australian colonies in 1857, the creation of the Dominion of Canada in 1867 and the grant of responsible government to Cape Colony in 1872 had increased the disquiet. At the same time, the advance of Russia in Central Asia seemed to bring a powerful European state menacingly nearer the frontiers of the Indian Empire. Many began to argue that the Liberal recipes of *laissez aller*, non-intervention in European affairs and 'dismantling' of the empire would not do. Even some Liberals began to share these views. By this time, the Reform Act of 1867 had enfranchised one out of every three male adults in Britain and had thus doubled the electorate.

Benjamin Disraeli, the leader of the Conservative Party, who is often described as 'the arch tactician', sensed that political capital could be made out of the rising tide of criticism of the 'spineless' policies of the Liberal government. He also appreciated that if Toryism was to survive in the days of extension of franchise, it was essential for it to take up issues that would fascinate the masses. He picked up the imperial theme, which enabled the Conservatives to project their party as an epitome of the spirit of patriotism and glories of the empire. In his speeches of 1872, he remoulded the image of the party. He projected the Conservative Party as a national party which would strive to maintain the traditional institutions, uphold the empire of England and alleviate the condition of the people. In the famous speech delivered at Free Trade Hall in Manchester in April 1872, which has been regarded as one of the great moments of Victorian rhetoric, he exhorted his audience to be proud of the fact that the Queen of England had become 'the sovereign of the most powerful of the Oriental states'. He added that 'there never was a moment in our history when the power of England was so great and her resources so vast and inexhaustible'. He expressed his conviction that the possession of a vast empire should influence the standing of Britain in the hierarchy of nations. Towards

Europe he promised 'a policy of reserve, but proud reserve'.[2] A little later, in June, in his speech at the Crystal Palace in South London, he offered the voters glory along with reforms. 'The working class of England …are for maintaining the greatness of the kingdom and the empire', he said. He criticised the Liberals for working deliberately and continuously for the disintegration of the empire. He also indicted them for depicting India as an 'incubus' and for persuading the nation to abandon India, despite the fact that India had been shown 'with precise, with mathematical demonstration to be the most costly jewel in the Crown of England'.[3]

The Conservatives in power

In the elections held in 1874 the Conservatives got a resounding victory. Disraeli formed the government that continued until 1880. He regarded foreign policy as the most important and the fascinating task of a statesman. He held that Britain should follow sturdier and more forthright diplomacy and, in the process, stand forth as the diplomatic leader of Europe. Throughout his period of office, external events remained in the forefront of the national agenda. He strove to make Britain act like a great European power as well as a great imperial power. In the process, he gave new content to the concern for empire in which he believed India had a special place. He unabashedly flaunted Britain's possession of the Indian Empire before the European nations with a view to strengthening Britain's voice in international forums. In conducting relations with the European powers, he was careful to ensure the safety of routes to India and the frontiers of India. This was the time when the word 'imperialism' had just entered British political vocabulary. Until 1880 it was still regarded as neologism. Disraeli used the words 'empire' and 'imperium' repeatedly in his speeches and manifestos. But 'imperialism' did not yet connote a policy of territorial expansion. When Gladstone and other Liberals spoke of 'Beaconsfieldian imperialism', the word stood for greater activity of the Conservative government in European international affairs and especially for Disraeli's growing interest in the Indian Empire.[4]

A comment on the controversy over Disraeli's attitude towards colonies would not be out of place here. At one stage, Disraeli had described the colonies as 'millstones around our necks' and as 'dead weights'. It has been argued that, in 1872, being the archetypal opportunist that he was, he craftily annexed the empire sentiment to the Conservative Party.[5] Towards the Indian Empire, however, his views seem to have remained consistent. Even R. Koebner and H.D. Schmidt, who describe Disraeli's famous Crystal Palace speech as 'a piece of demagogic self-advertisement', accept that 'the only element in Disraeli's advocacy of the British empire, which was really of long standing was his belief in the importance of the Indian Empire'.[6] It was in 1842 that Disraeli, at that time a Tory backbencher, spoke in Parliament on the Indian Empire question for the first time. The Afghan War had just ended in ignominious failure. In a scathing criticism of the government, he said that if Russia did indeed pose a threat to the Indian Empire then it had not done enough; it should have declared

war both in the Black Sea and the Baltic Sea. Describing the Indian Empire as 'a part of England', he said that the difficulties of the Company in Central Asia were England's difficulties.[7] During the Revolt of 1857, Disraeli delivered a three hour speech in the House of Commons in which he presented his analysis of the causes of the Great Revolt. He said that the decline and fall of empires could not be affairs of greased cartridges.[8] He also expressed his belief that the possession of India conferred economic strength on Britain. Britain could use it as a weapon to force other countries to reduce tariff duties. In its dealings with the United States, Britain could threaten to import cotton from India; with Russia Indian flax, hemp and tallow; and with Brazil, Indian sugar and coffee.[9]

The beginning of Disraeli's imperialism has been allocated to the Abyssinian campaign of 1867. As the Chancellor of the Exchequer and Leader of the House of Commons, he had encouraged the sending of this expedition to rescue British captives there and thus assert Britain's position as a great power. This was also the time when the government was facing a domestic crisis on the question of parliamentary reform and, therefore, wanted popular support. Historians have debated whether the two events were coincidental or consequential, or whether it was subordinate officials who forced the hands of the government.[10] But the Indian connection cannot be denied. At least, since the 1840s, the Foreign Office had been engaged in episodic struggle to secure Britain's strategic interests in Abyssinia. This expedition to Abyssinia has to be situated in this context. It is notable that the members of Parliament gave sanction to the expenditure incurred 'obediently enough'.[11] In the press the news of its success was received with enthusiasm and bombast. The ready approval of Parliament and the press had much to do with the strategic importance of this state on the route to India.

The main headings under which Britain's foreign policy during 1874–80 is generally presented read as follows: purchase of the shares of the Suez Canal Company, the assumption of title of Empress of India by the Queen, Britain and the Near Eastern Crisis, role in the Congress of Berlin, the Second Afghan War and the South African War. It is worth noting, however, that the bottom line in each case was concern for the frontiers of India or the routes to India. In describing his policy as not just of 'reserve' but 'proud reserve', Disraeli underlined that any policy of aloofness from continental entanglements was to flow from a consciousness of Britain's strength. He gave new content to British foreign policy by claiming weight in the Council of Europe by virtue of Britain's possession of a vast empire.

Britain had found the existence of Dreikaisersbund of Germany, Russia and Austria very uncomfortable. It created a formidable front of the three monarchical states not only against the forces of disruption but also for diplomatic co-operation. It seemed to highlight the elevation of Russia and the isolation of Britain. In 1875, Disraeli got the opportunity to demonstrate that the British government was not ready to stand aloof from international affairs any longer. Since 1871, there had been recurrent rumours about a German assault on France. By 1874, France seemed to be recovering economically from the wounds of 1870–1 and reports were reaching Berlin about military preparations being made in France. At this stage, during the first half of 1875, some inflammatory

articles appeared in the German press suggesting that Germany was contemplating a pre-emptive invasion of France. Whether or not Bismarck inspired these articles has not been finally established, but it led Disraeli to join Russia in expressing concern in Berlin about these rumours. Bismarck denied any intention of molesting France and blamed German newspapers for the whole affair. He also gave assurances of the peaceful intentions of Germany.[12] With this, the war scare evaporated. Thus, without any risk or cost, Disraeli was able to demonstrate the changed tone of Britain's foreign policy. The co-operation with Russia stimulated Disraeli's imagination and he began to think in terms of an agreement between Britain and Russia.[13]

Share in the Suez Canal

Disraeli took a more sensational initiative in the imperial arena by arranging the purchase of the shares of the Suez Canal. Britain had opposed the construction of the Canal primarily because it was likely to expose its Indian Empire to the warships of European powers.[14] Later, Britain had refused to take up any shares. De Lesseps, resentful of Britain's treatment of him, continually made trouble by raising the dues charged to British shipping. By the time the Conservatives came to power, it was apparent that the decision not to buy the shares of the Suez Canal had been a mistake. Since the Canal was there, it seemed best to safeguard British interests by participating in decisions governing the Canal.

By 1875, the pecuniary embarrassments of the Khedive of Egypt, Ismail Pasha, reached such a state that he faced the prospect of having to raise some four million pounds by 30 November 1875. He sought a purchaser for his shares. For this purpose, he commenced negotiations to sell his shares. Disraeli came to know of this. He masterminded the affair with considerable skill. Without authorisation from Parliament, he was able to arrange the sum through his friendship with the Rothschilds, the most international of all banking houses. He bought up the entire stock and thus made Britain the largest single shareholder. He got full support from the Queen, the Prince of Wales, the Governor-General of India and the entire Cabinet. In the country, the purchase provoked general surprise at first; then, after some hesitation, it was welcomed as a national triumph.[15] The step was regarded as an emphatic assertion of British power before European countries which had grown too accustomed to ignoring Britain. The question was not just one of retrieving national honour. In Parliament, Disraeli recommended the purchase not as 'a financial investment'; but as 'a political transaction' on the ground that it 'secures to us a highway to our Indian Empire and other dependencies'.[16] It is significant that the House of Commons, too, voted money without a division.

Parading the Indian connection

To flaunt the Indian connection and to underline the centrality of empire for Britain, Disraeli arranged the visit of the Prince of Wales to India. The Prince

had set his heart on such a visit and Disraeli approved of the idea, believing that the ceremonial aspect and personal contact would make Britain and India more aware of each other. But there was the problem of providing funds for the purpose. As Disraeli put it to Salisbury after visiting the Queen at Windsor, 'He has not a shilling: she will not give him one'.[17] It is significant that the House of Commons sanctioned £52,000 for the round trip for the prince and his party, to which the government of India was to contribute, and £60,000 for his personal expenses, with minimum of difficulty.[18]

In 1876 the government decided that Queen Victoria should be proclaimed the 'Empress of India'. The idea had been mooted in 1858 when the government had issued the 'Proclamation' to the people of India announcing the end of the East India Company and the taking over of the administration of India by the Crown. When King William of Prussia took the title of Emperor of Germany in 1871, the idea began to take definite shape in the Queen's mind. Disraeli took up the issue and introduced the Royal Titles Bill in the House of Commons. It was presented as an omission from the Government of India Act of 1858. In the House, justifying the decision, Disraeli argued that such a proclamation would serve notice on Europe that India was of major importance to Britain and that the parliament of England was determined to uphold the empire.[19] The House did not oppose the contents of the bill, though there was opposition on a purely constitutional aspect.[20] In a darbar held at Delhi on 1 January 1877, Queen Victoria was proclaimed the 'Empress of India' with all possible ceremony. The jubilant Queen held a small dinner to celebrate the occasion, where she made it a point to wear only the jewellery that had been presented to her by Indian rulers.[21] In the public mind, her elevation to the position of Empress of India marked her transformation from 'petulant widow to imperial matriarch'. Thereafter, the monarchy became increasingly associated with imperial imagery.[22]

The crisis in the Near East[23]

Revolt in the Balkans

In July 1875 there was a revolt in the Ottoman provinces of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which speedily ignited the century-old Eastern Question. There was popular sympathy for the rebels in Serbia and Montenegro, which threatened to drive these two states into conflict with the Ottomans. There was a wave of sympathy for them amongst the Pan-Slavs in Russia. Even Austria-Hungary could not remain indifferent, not only because it stood to lose by the success of nationalist principle in its vicinity, but also because thousands of Serbs and Croats were entering its borders. All British governments had shown grave concern about happenings in this region. Disraeli was determined to safeguard Britain's well-known interests and, in the process, make the continent hear Britain's voice.

The general opinion in European chancelleries was that if nothing was done,

the insurrection would spread. European powers, therefore, made efforts to bring about a settlement between the Porte and its subjects by suggesting changes in various aspects of the administrative policies of the Ottomans. Towards the end of December 1875, the Dreikaisersbund powers prepared a joint programme of 'reforms' to be carried out by the Ottoman government in the rebellious provinces which became known as 'the Andrassy Note', named after the Austrian Foreign Minister. It was circulated to other European powers. France gave ready support, while the adhesion of Britain was tardy and lukewarm. The effort came to nothing because the Ottoman government did not make any serious effort to implement the programme and the insurgents were in no mood to accept any compromise solution.

When these proposals for compromise between the Porte and the rebels seemed to fail, Bismarck made offers of an understanding to Britain three times in the four weeks of January 1876.[24] There is difference of opinion amongst historians as to the motives of Bismarck.[25] Broadly speaking, it seems that he wanted to prevent the escalation of the crisis and so offered to oppose or support the partition of the Ottoman Empire in return for unspecified British support for Germany. But the British government remained cool towards such suggestions. One reason, of course, was distrust of Bismarck's motives. But another, and more important, reason was that to the Conservative government, the interests of Britain seemed likely to be better served by continuation of the policy of maintaining the Ottoman Empire.

Meanwhile, the revolt spread to Bulgaria where the Ottoman government suppressed it ruthlessly. One more effort was made to resolve the crisis during the summer of 1876. On a suggestion emanating from Tsar Alexander, the Foreign Ministers of the three 'Northern Courts' met at Berlin during the second week of May. They worked out another programme of 'concessions' to be granted by the Ottomans to their rebellious subjects. It was sent to London, Paris and Rome, asking the governments there to say yes or no telegraphically. The British government rejected the proposal. The ostensible reason was that Britain was not being treated by Germany, Russia and Austria as an equal partner. This is obvious from Disraeli's oft-quoted statement: 'They are beginning to treat England as if we were Montenegro or Bosnia'.[26] But, as historians generally accept now, Britain's opposition did not spring merely from issues of procedure or diplomatic protocol. Nor was Britain's reaction extemporaneous. The issue was fully discussed by the ambassadors of Britain, France and Italy at Berlin.[27] The real objection of the British government was that the Dreikaisersbund powers had threatened to use force if the Ottoman government did not respond. In this London saw an attempt, on Russia's part, to infiltrate south-east Europe and, possibly, to seize the straits. Disraeli gave vent to his feelings in a letter to the Queen: 'Had your Majesty sanctioned the Berlin Memorandum, Constantinople would at this moment have been garrisoned by Russia and the Turkish fleet placed under Russian protection'.[28]

Though the British government rejected the Memorandum, it took necessary precautions. The third paragraph of the Berlin Memorandum had suggested

that in case the plan did not succeed all the powers should come to an agreement upon the naval measures to be taken for the safety of foreigners and the Christian subjects of the Porte. The Foreign Office immediately alerted the Admiralty.[29] A warning was also issued against violation of agreement on the straits question. On 24 May, a British fleet was sent to Besika Bay just outside the Dardanelles. This was not done to strengthen the Ottoman Empire *per se*. 'This was done', as Disraeli had commented without mincing words, 'not…to protect Christians or Turks, but to uphold your Majesty's Empire'.[30] At Constantinople, the arrival of the British fleet was welcomed by the Ottomans as proof of the fact that Britain was on their side. This encouraged them to stick to the defiant posture they had adopted. Meanwhile, the governments of Serbia and Montenegro came under tremendous pressure from the people to intervene, which increased noticeably with each failure of the European powers to force the Ottomans to grant concessions. In June, Sultan Abdul Aziz died under mysterious circumstances. This resulted in confusion and uncertainty at Constantinople and fostered a rebellious mood. On 30 June 1876, Serbia declared war, followed by Montenegro the next day. Thereafter, the question before the European powers was not just of pacifying the Balkan Christians but of preventing further spread of war. In this situation, Russia and Austria carried on talks alternately contemplating possibilities both of an Ottoman victory over Serbia and of an Ottoman defeat.[31]

Disraeli had hoped to rally the country behind the 'national policy' of sustaining the Ottoman Empire. But, by July, reports began to spread in Europe of the atrocities committed by the Ottoman army. This produced a powerful revulsion against the Ottoman government. In Britain, Gladstone, who had ceased to take interest in politics after his defeat in 1874, saw in the events in the Balkans an opportunity to stage a comeback by stirring 'national conscience' against atrocities perpetrated by the Turks in Bulgaria. He was supported by other Liberals and Radicals, who began to portray Russia as the champion of the maltreated and misgoverned people fighting for their freedom. In a pamphlet that appeared on 6 September 1876 under the title 'Bulgarian Horrors and the Question of the East', Gladstone denounced the Conservatives for supporting the Ottoman government which had followed barbarous policies to suppress the Bulgar insurgents and projected Russia as the protector of Balkan Christians. Public indignation against the Turks reached such a pitch that 200,000 copies of this pamphlet were sold in a month. Gladstone kept public temperature running high with fiery speeches. Subsequently, correspondents reached the war front and sent reports on the plight of Serb and Bosnian refugees, which were published in British journals. This added fuel to the humanitarian flame.

Meanwhile, in the Balkans, Serbia was not faring well. In this situation, Pan-Slav volunteers began to leave Russia to join the insurgents. The government at St Petersburg came under tremendous pressure to intervene. During the autumn, the Ottoman army defeated the Serbs and was set to occupy the Serbian capital, Belgrade. The British government became anxious that the Russian government, calculating that 'the atrocities agitation' had emasculated London's ability to

retaliate, might declare war on Turkey. This would have increased the influence of Russia tremendously. London became so alarmed at this stage that Disraeli, Salisbury and Lytton, the Viceroy and the Governor-General of India, began to think in terms of opening a front against Russia in Central Asia.[32] Finally, the Russian government issued an ultimatum that forced the Ottoman government to retreat. An armistice followed.

In this background, Disraeli promoted the idea of a conference of European powers. Ultimately, such a conference was held in Constantinople from 23 December 1876 to 20 January 1877. The aim was to reconcile the Balkan peoples to Ottoman rule by removing their well-grounded grievances. The Porte agreed to participate in this conference only after Britain threatened to abandon it to its fate in case it became involved in a war with Russia. Salisbury, at that time the Secretary of State for India, represented Britain. On 23 December, the day the conference began, the Sultan startled the representatives by promulgating a constitution on his own. However, the conference continued. Salisbury tried to negotiate with Russia on the basis of division of the province of Bulgaria into two autonomous units, but his efforts did not bear fruit because of disagreement amongst the powers on the composition of the foreign military force for occupation of these provinces and because Midhat, the Grand Vazier, made it clear that the Ottomans would not 'commit suicide' by agreeing to the dismemberment of the empire. It is significant that Salisbury's brief also included an exchange of views with Ignatieff, the Russian ambassador at Constantinople, for working out a settlement to ensure the security of the north west frontier of the Indian Empire.[33] When the Constantinople conference seemed to fail, the chief regret of Salisbury was that prospects of a deal with Ignatieff over Central Asia would also fail. So important was this issue for the British government that D.R. Gillard comments 'for this Salisbury would have gladly sacrificed the Turks'.[34]

During the Constantinople Conference, when efforts to revamp the Ottoman Empire did not seem to succeed, both Disraeli and Salisbury contemplated the possibility of partitioning the empire. Disraeli thought of negotiating with Austria to this end. He also discussed the question with Shuvalov, the Russian ambassador at London.[35] Salisbury began to see many virtues in this policy. He wrote to Lytton that a partition would allow the Powers to achieve the ends for which they had continually to intrigue and quarrel at Constantinople.[36] He even asked certain military and technical experts to examine and prepare a note on important strategic positions in the Eastern Mediterranean which could be occupied to protect Britain's interests in case the Ottoman Empire was partitioned.[37] It might be pointed out that this feeling in favour of partition of the Ottoman Empire was not the result of the atrocities' agitation. This shift in attitude was the result of the growing conviction that the nutritious diet of loans had failed to revamp 'the sick man' and that the Ottoman government would not be able to stem Russia's advance.[38] The European Great Powers failed to make the Porte accept their proposals. On 20 January 1877, the Congress broke up in defeat.[39]

By the beginning of 1877, it seemed certain that Russia would declare war on

Turkey. Russia started negotiations with Austria to ensure the latter's neutrality. In any such war, Russia was sure to be victorious. No British government had ever remained indifferent to any such eventuality. Britain had the most fervent desire to prevent Russia from advancing, but it lacked the military resources to do so. Its position on the continent too was unenviable. France, its ally during the Crimean War, was now relatively impotent and was in any case, intensely annoyed with Britain because of the latter's purchase of the Khedive's shares of the Suez Canal. Italy, though sympathetic, was too weak to be of any consequence. Germany, Austria and Russia, though far from being in complete harmony, were sufficiently united to ignore Britain's views.[40] The government was very conscious of its lack of military resources. In June 1877, Salisbury, who had become Foreign Secretary, wrote to Lytton: 'Russia knows perfectly well that she is unassailable by us…There is absolutely no point at which we could attack her with any chance of doing serious injury…The result, of course, is that Russia being unassailable by our arms, is deaf to our diplomacy and remonstrances upon the subject of her advance in Asia have become a trite and not very edifying Foreign Office norm.'[41] Even if the British government had the military resources and necessary support from other powers, it seemed politically inexpedient to make any attempt to establish its own control over Constantinople. Muslims all over the world looked upon the Sultan of Turkey as their Khalifa. Any policy of annihilation of Turkey would have outraged the feelings of Muslims in India. Lytton even warned that the resentment of Muslims would be shared by the Hindus and that any attempt to fight the Turks would compel the British to depend on the power of the sword amidst a hostile people enormously outnumbering them.[42] No such risk could be taken because the memories of the Revolt of 1857 were still fresh.

In this situation London came to accept once again that only a Turkish breakwater could stem the tide of Russia's expansion towards the Straits and that it was best to sustain Turkey's control on conditions that suited Britain. As Layard, the ambassador at Constantinople, wrote to Salisbury a little later: 'I believe that even now she [Turkey] would offer a stronger bulwark against Russia than any state or combination of states that could be formed out of Turkey in Europe'.[43] All talk of partition was given up. It is extremely interesting that even the British public did an about-face on this issue. The people, who had lapped up 200,000 copies of Gladstone's first pamphlet on Bulgarian atrocities during September-October 1876, purchased only 7,000 copies of his second pamphlet which was published in January 1877.[44] Gladstone's brilliant and innovative campaign hardly had any impact on foreign policy. The Russians no longer seemed to be the self-sacrificing apostles of 'civilisation' as was the case only four months earlier. Feelings against Russia became so intense that Gladstone had his windows broken for his pains.[45] At the official level, in view of the importance of the stakes involved, there was such panic that in mid-April Disraeli complained that there were twelve members and seven policies in the Cabinet.[46] He avoided summoning a meeting of the Cabinet until he could reconcile the varied and opposing opinions of his colleagues.[47]

Russo-Turkish War

On 24 April 1877 Russia declared war on Turkey. Britain lost no time in issuing a proclamation of neutrality. The Ottoman government viewed this as an exhibition of narrow selfishness and continued to nurse the fear that Britain would participate in a European partition of Turkey.[48] But Britain's proclamation was accompanied by an important proviso: 'so long as Turkish interests alone were involved'. 'Should the war now in progress unfortunately spread', the British government made it clear that there were interests which it was 'equally bound and determined to defend'. These interests were specified as 'the communication between Europe and the East by the Suez Canal, Egypt, Constantinople, navigation of the Bosphorus and Dardanelles and the Persian Gulf'.[49] Kenneth Bourne comments that England 'still had some interests for which he [Disraeli] believed she ought ultimately to fight'.[50] This is a chronic understatement. British interests in the whole region that linked Britain to the Indian Empire were perceived as so important that throughout the Russo-Turkish War, virtual panic permeated the British ruling elite when Russia seemed to succeed and there was a matching sense of relief when the Turks were able to stop the advance of Russia.

Initially Russia performed well. By June it looked as if the Russian army would establish its sway over the Ottoman Empire within a month. During this period Disraeli struggled to get the consent of his colleagues for taking steps to prevent Russia from reaching Gallipoli or Constantinople. He advocated a policy of reinforcing the fleet and strengthening the garrison at Malta. He tried to persuade Gathorne Hardy, the Secretary of State for War, to send an army to occupy Gallipoli so as to stop Russia from reaching the Dardanelles. He also expressed his anxiety to Salisbury that Russia might reach Constantinople before the English could establish themselves at the Dardanelles. Finally, at the end of June, a British fleet was sent to Besika Bay at the mouth of the Dardenelles.[51]

In July, the Turkish army was able to halt the advance of the Russian army. Turkish generals won a series of victories and prevented the Tsar's army from proceeding beyond Plevna in northern Bulgaria. At this stage tensions within the Cabinet eased. But, on 10 December, after a siege of 143 days, Russia was able to break the resistance of the Ottoman army. On 4 January Russian troops entered Sofia. By 20 January they were in Adrianople. After this, alarm in Britain reached serious proportions once again. Britain was not ready to watch while Russia seemed all set to march unhindered to Constantinople. At this stage the Cabinet united behind the Prime Minister to a degree that had not been possible for two years. The issues arising out of Russia's advance towards the Straits were discussed at the stormy meetings of the Cabinet on 21 and 22 January. So nervous were the Ministers at the prospect that they decided to take drastic steps. These included sending a fleet through the Dardanelles, negotiating an alliance with Austria and summoning Parliament to obtain a £6 million vote of credit. The debate was held in both Houses of Parliament during the first week of February and continued for four days. Finally, the motion on the vote of credit was carried, as many as 328 members voting for the motion and

only 204 against. Many Liberals voted with the government.[52] During the debate, discussing the policy of the government Sir Strafford Northcote, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, spelled out three objects: maintenance of the commercial freedom of the Black Sea, durable settlement of the Turkish provinces and preventing 'any power from establishing itself in a position dangerous to our route to India'.

Meanwhile an armistice was signed between Russia and Turkey on 31 January 1878, the official version of which reached London on 5 or 6 February.[53] This did not ease the tension. In Britain the feeling remained that Russia might be duping both Britain and the Porte in an attempt to establish control over almost defenceless Constantinople. During February and March, peace between Russia and Britain hung by a very thin thread. In view of political uncertainty and suspicion of Russia, war fever gripped Britain. There were public demonstrations throughout the country expressing a 'patriotic' aversion to Russia and support for Her Majesty's ministers. In the first week of February a pro-war crowd including many workingmen 'created a disturbance for several hours' near the Cannon Street Station in London. The crowd then marched to the Guildhall waving Union Jacks and singing patriotic songs.[54] So intense was the feeling against Russia that police protection had to be provided for Gladstone to save him from 'patriotic mobs'.[55] British interests and 'Imperial interests' became popular phrases. This was the period of the famous music hall song which added the word 'jingoism' to British vocabulary.[56]

Despite support from the public and Parliament, the government found it difficult to formulate and execute a straightforward policy. Disraeli repeatedly urged the Cabinet to sanction the occupation of Gallipoli. During this period, the British fleet remained in the Sea of Marmora. During February, orders were given for the fleet to be moved up to Constantinople three times in three weeks.[57] This hesitation and vacillation[58] on the part of the government and the panic that gripped the country were indicative of the intensity of the stakes involved. In fact, these are the most visible instances of offensive operations. The British squadron did not fire a shot while stationed off Constantinople, but the British were conscious that its very presence there was a check on Russia. On 16 February the British Cabinet decided to advance a loan to Austria to enable it to mobilise a sufficient force on its frontier.[59] Badly short of cash, the Turkish government sold four vessels being built in Britain. Disraeli's government bought three of these with funds provided by Parliament in order to prevent them from falling into the hands of any other power 'by appeasement or treachery'.[60]

By the last week of February the Russian army had reached San Stefano, some ten kilometres from Constantinople. On 3 March, a treaty was signed there between the Russian and Turkish governments. Under the terms of this treaty Rumania, Serbia and Montenegro were made fully independent states; the first two were considerably augmented in size. Bosnia and Herzegovina were made autonomous states. Bulgaria was considerably enlarged and was made a tributary to the Ottoman ruler; it was to enjoy full autonomy under a Christian government and was to have a national militia. The Russian government was to

supervise the establishment of the new regime and to occupy Bulgaria for up to two years. In the Asiatic parts of the Ottoman Empire, Russia claimed Ardahan, Batum and Kars. The Ottoman government was made to pledge 'reforms' in Armenia.[61]

Britain reacted virulently. The entire course of the Russo-Turkish War had demonstrated not just the weakness of Turkey but the determination of Russia to expand. This reinforced Britain's desire to sustain the Ottoman Empire as a barrier against Russia's expansion over the area around Constantinople and Asiatic Turkey. Even before the terms of the Treaty of San Stefano were officially conveyed to London, the British government let it be known that at least some of its terms would have to be submitted to the scrutiny and approval of the Great Powers. Throughout March, with Russian troops ringed around Constantinople and with the British fleet within the Sea of Marmora, the atmosphere in Britain remained charged. British reservists were mobilised, war loans were approved and the First British Army Corps embarked on troops transporters for Malta. On 27 March, Disraeli persuaded the Cabinet to summon to the Mediterranean a large body of Indian troops to add weight to Britain's voice.[62]

In April 1878, Salisbury made Britain's objections to this Treaty unequivocally clear in a circular to the European powers. He argued that the cumulative effect of this treaty would be substitution of the influence and control of Russia alone in regions where Britain was unwilling to see Russia in a position of ascendency.[63] This region covered the flank of the Straits, the Persian Gulf and the Suez Canal. This despatch was communicated to Parliament and flashed in newspapers all over the continent. The British government objected particularly to provisions relating to the new state of Bulgaria and to Asiatic Turkey. The enlarged state of Bulgaria, referred to as 'Big Bulgaria' by contemporaries, was in size almost as big as all the remaining Ottoman possessions in Europe. It was taken for granted that its administration and garrisons would be in Russian hands and that it would constitute a Russian sphere of influence. It was found most objectionable that this state was to extend in the south to the Aegean and in the east to the Black Sea, thus securing for Russia a double seaboard. Constantinople was some 150 kilometres from its borders, and it was within easy military reach of Russia's own frontiers. Apprehensions were expressed that even the remainder of the Sultan's dominions in Europe would not remain in his hands.[64]

Russia's acquisitions of Ardahan, Batum and Kars to the east of the Black Sea seemed to make it virtually the mistress of Turkey's Asiatic dominions. Batum was one open port which could give Britain a base on the Black Sea from where it hoped to implement the strategy of attacking Russia in the trans-Caspian region.[65] It was apprehended that these acquisitions would give Russia control over the Euphrates–Tigris valley and all highways from the Black Sea to northern Persia. What seemed worse was that Russia could capture parts of Armenia without inviting opposition from the European powers because this part of Turkey mattered little to Europe. Layard discussed the question of

Russia's expansion in Armenia at great length.[66] He argued that such control would give Russia command of Asia Minor, Azerbaijan and the Euphrates–Tigris valley. Russia, in possession of Armenia and with the straits open to its fleet, would be able to cut off access to India because the Suez was not always dependable. Sinking a few ships in it could easily block it. Similar views were expressed by Richard Temple, the Governor of Bombay, in his correspondence with Salisbury.[67] Layard's despatches were printed for circulation to the members of the Cabinet, sent to the India Office and often to the government of India and must have influenced the opinions of those responsible for taking decisions. Besides these strategic calculations, concern for the prestige of the Raj also entered the calculations of policy makers. A fear was expressed that in view of Russia's success, people in Asia, especially Muslims, would begin to look upon Russia as the coming power. Salisbury said in Parliament a little later that there was hardly any chance of acquiescence of Indians to British rule once they knew that Russia's power was dominant in Mesopotamia and Asia Minor.

The British government did not even pretend that the Treaty of San Stefano was compatible with its interests. Austria too had grievances against this settlement, and made ostentatious preparations to improve its bargaining position. After the war with Turkey came to an end, the weakness and isolation of Russia made it difficult for it to resist the demands for a European congress. As early as 25 January 1878, Gorchakov had promised that those aspects of the peace settlement which were of interest to European powers would be decided only by an agreement between them.[68] The Ottomans, too, were exhausted and looked upon Britain as their 'saviour'. Therefore, Russia agreed to place the treaty before a congress of European powers.

After considering many venues, it was decided that the Congress would be held at Berlin. The powers which were signatory to the Paris Treaty of 1856 were invited, including Italy for Sardinia and Germany for Prussia. Bismarck chaired the Congress, though he was aware that the attempt to mediate between the two flank powers meant taking sides and hence alienating one of them. One reason for his accepting the offer was his fear that there might be a war between Britain and Russia which could escalate into a European conflagration with consequences that could be unfavourable for Germany. It would have been difficult for Austria-Hungary to stay out of it. Disraeli and Salisbury attended as British plenipotentiaries. The basic lines of settlement were worked out in the preliminary agreements involving Britain, Russia and Austria.

Disraeli staged a *coup de tete* during the last week of May 1878 when seven thousand Indian soldiers landed on the island of Malta.[69] The event created tremendous excitement among all classes in Britain. The dramatic effect was enhanced by the fact that the landing began on 25 May, the birthday of the Queen. The spectacle of the soldiers of their empire landing so near the European coast flattered the newly enfranchised working class, who perhaps regarded it as a symbol of their own majesty. The purpose was to demonstrate that Britain had at its disposal 'an inexhaustible supply of men' and hence the ability to act as a terrene power. Disraeli looked upon it as an answer to 'the

sneers of our not having any great military force'.[70] Some Liberals and Radicals did force a three-day debate on the issue in the Commons, but they were not questioning the policy which this action represented. The issue they raised was constitutional: why was Parliament not informed of this expedition before the beginning of the Easter recess on 18 April? Ultimately, the government won, with 347 votes in favour and 226 against. Not only were the speeches of the Liberals less virulent in their condemnation of the government, but many Liberals voted for the motion. In the division on the supplementary estimates required for the expedition, Gladstone and Hartington abstained from voting.[71]

The Congress of Berlin

The Berlin Congress began on 13 June 1878 and ended on 13 July the same year. Under the Settlement the territorial possessions of the Ottomans were reduced considerably. The independence of Rumania, Serbia and Montenegro were recognised. Austria was allowed to 'occupy' Bosnia and Herzegovina. The powers also accepted the annexation of Bessarbia by Russia, of Thessali and Epirus by Greece and garrisoning of the Sanjak of Novibazar[72] by Austria. From the point of view of Britain, the most important provisions related to Bulgaria. The state of 'Big Bulgaria' created at San Stefano was divided into three parts: a reduced state of Bulgaria which was to be autonomous, a semi-autonomous province of eastern Roumelia, and the third part (Macedonia) that passed under unqualified Turkish rule. By creating a semi-autonomous Eastern Roumelia, the Balkan mountain range was secured for the Turks as the last barrier on Russia's road to Constantinople.[73] By placing Macedonia under Turkey, Russia was stopped from reaching the Aegean Sea.

In Asia Minor, Russia stoutly refused to give up control over Batum, Kars and Ardahan. In the preliminary discussions during the last week of May, Salisbury had merely succeeded in getting an assurance that the Russian frontier in Asiatic Turkey would not be further extended. This caused considerable disquietitude in London. Thereafter, the British government decided to revitalise and strengthen the hold of the Ottomans over Armenia so as to make it a bulwark against Russia's drive towards the Persian Gulf or the Suez Canal. On 4 June 1878, before the Congress of Berlin started, Layard, on instructions from Salisbury, signed the Convention of Defensive Alliance, better known from its most important article as the Cyprus Convention. It provided that if Batum, Kars and Ardahan were retained by Russia, Britain would defend Turkey's Asiatic dominions by force of arms. On his part, the Sultan promised to introduce necessary 'reforms' for the protection of Christians and other subjects in Armenia. In order to enable Britain to supervise the execution of 'reforms', the Sultan assigned the island of Cyprus to Britain to be 'provisionally occupied and administered'.[74]

In fact, the question of occupying some strategic position in the Near East or the Middle East was fervently discussed throughout 1877 and the first half of 1878.[75] The existing Mediterranean base at Malta appeared too far west to be of

much immediate help in a crisis. It seemed desirable to have some place further East from whence Constantinople and Egypt could be watched.[76] British observers in this region – the British ambassador at Constantinople, the political agent in Turkish Arabia and the chargé d'affairs at Tehran – recommended the occupation of Mohammarah which was situated some forty kilometres from Basra.[77] The British Foreign Office discussed other alternatives including Alexandretta on the entrance of the Dardanelles, Crete, Lemnos and Mytilene. The choice finally fell on Cyprus. There were several reasons for this choice. This island possessed some harbours which, it was thought, could easily be fortified and used as naval and commercial bases.[78] Militarily too, control over Cyprus seemed very useful. Russia was expanding in Central Asia. The British government had always remained uneasy about the fact that because of geopolitical reasons it was not in a position to put military pressure on Russia at any point. Cyprus could provide the place from where a Russian army, advancing towards the Persian Gulf or the Suez Canal from the headwaters of the Tigris and Euphrates or from the Caucasus, could be cut into two by the British. Cyprus was preferable to Malta because it was nearer the scene of likely action. Disraeli had also calculated that occupation of Cyprus would be useful in case the need for a military occupation of Egypt arose. As he wrote to the Queen, 'In 4 and 20 hours, almost in a night, a couple of your Majesty's ships might carry a couple of thousand men from that island to Alexandria'.[79] Salisbury laid so much stress on the importance of a new base in the Mediterranean that he made it clear to the Sultan that Britain was prepared to occupy this island whether or not the Sultan issued the permissive *firman*. The stakes seemed very high. Disraeli stated unequivocally in the House of Commons: 'Our Indian Empire is…a source of great anxiety, and the time appears to have arrived when, if possible, we should terminate that anxiety…In taking Cyprus the movement is not Mediterranean, it is Indian'.[80] Subsequently, a wing of a battalion was stationed in Cyprus and the rest at Malta.

Even the insistence on introducing 'reforms' in Armenia was a well-calculated move. It did not stem from any desire to improve the lot of the Christian subjects of the Porte, or the Armenians in particular. The feeling at Whitehall was that a discontented population could provide opportunity to Russia to interfere in this region or even at Constantinople, while contented and loyal people would serve as a bulwark against Russia's advance towards the Persian Gulf.[81] This was the aim behind giving the unilateral undertaking to defend Turkey's Asiatic possessions if the Turkish government made efforts to improve the condition of the people. Besides, it was believed that Britain's association would show to the Armenians a stronger flag than the Turkish and would thus ensure their allegiance to Ottoman rule and make them resist Russia's advance.[82] The responsibility of defending Turkey's Asiatic dominions by force of arms was onerous. Although conditional, such an undertaking did involve an obligation to go to war should the *causus foedris* arise.[83] Britain was not yet entrenched in Egypt. Therefore, it seemed important that the Anatolia–Mesopotamia region remain under the Turks. It is significant that until this time the project of a railway on

this 'alternate route' had not been abandoned. Such a route could rescue the British from all the complications arising out of any difficulty with the French or the eventuality of the Suez route becoming non-functional.

In short, the arrangements relating to Cyprus and Armenia, have to be viewed together. The aim was to ensure control over the route to the Indian Empire. So keen was the British government to make this arrangement, that in order to win French support for the move, it agreed to withdraw its objection to the extension of French influence from Algeria to Tunis. It may also be mentioned that in return for this 'occupation' Cyprus was made to pay an annual tribute of £92,000 to the Ottoman ruler though, as Winston Churchill admitted thirty years later, the Convention was made 'for our purpose'.[84] Gladstone termed this Convention 'an insane covenant'. It is significant that when he became the Prime Minister, he did not cancel the lease of Cyprus even after the occupation of Alexandria in 1882.

For the Foreign Office, even the provisions relating to European Turkey, Armenia and Cyprus did not fully cover every ground of objection to the Treaty of San Stefano. Without the right to enter the straits, Britain had no means of adopting the Black Sea strategy of preventing Russia from advancing overland towards India's frontiers or to the Persian Gulf. Salisbury tried to get unequivocal assurance from the Russians that they would not turn Batum into a naval base.[85] When Russia showed disinclination to give such an undertaking, Salisbury began to contemplate an understanding with the Sultan that would enable British warships to cross the Straits and make use of British naval supremacy in the Black Sea so as to prevent Russia from expanding.[86] Under the London Protocol of 1871, the straits had been closed to warships of all nations. In his Despatch of 6 May 1877, Derby had described 'the existing arrangements' as 'wise and salutary'.[87] But by 1878, these seemed inadequate. After a considerable exchange of views within the Cabinet and with the Ottoman government, on 11 July 1878, just two days before the Berlin Congress concluded, a declaration was made concerning the Straits Convention. It stated that, in any future crisis, Great Britain must be allowed to judge whether the Sultan was really free enough from foreign control to give or withhold his consent to a British passage through the straits.[88] The net result of this declaration was to transfer the decision regarding passage through the straits from Constantinople to London.

It was thus the British lion that roared at Berlin. At the Congress, Disraeli was seen as the Prime Minister of a leading country possessing a big empire whose resources he could use as and when needed. He became a European celebrity. Crowds followed him as he walked.[89] On their return to Britain, Disraeli and Salisbury were welcomed with great fanfare for bringing 'peace with honour' and as 'the arbiters of the affairs of mankind'. One may wonder whether they became arbiters, yet the 'peace' they had brought with them served Britain's purposes well. They had gone there not to maintain the integrity of the Ottoman Empire but to prevent a hostile power from installing itself in this region of crucial importance to Britain. They made provisions for stalling the advance of

Russia towards Constantinople, the straits, the Mediterranean and the Persian Gulf. To cap it all, Britain got control over Cyprus as an 'observation post'.

It would not be out of place to comment on Richard Millman's assessment of this phase of the Eastern Question here.[90] He finds Britain's three agreements – with Turkey, Russia and Austria – 'inconsistent and disingenuous'. This is an outcome of the fact that he sees the purposes of Britain's foreign policy as ending the position of diplomatic isolation and placing Britain in the mainstream of decision making at Berlin. But for Britain, these were not the motives. Britain's role in the Eastern Question cannot be assessed in any context other than that of the commitment to maintain control over the Indian Empire for which security of routes to India was an essential prerequisite and security of the frontiers of India essential. Millman says: 'The purpose of the pact with St Petersburg was to scale down the clauses of the San Stefano treaty in order to allow the Porte an independent existence in Europe'. Allowing an independent existence to the Porte was not an end in itself. Britain made efforts to sustain the Ottoman Empire in Europe because the Ottomans seemed to be the best 'occupiers' of the vital area around Constantinople and the straits and not for any other reason. Further, on the Cyprus Convention, Millman comments that the occupation of Cyprus for 'preventing Ottoman disintegration in Asia following upon Russian gains in Armenia…made little sense'. It seems to make little sense to Millman because he analyses the Russian acquisition of Batum, Kars and Ardahan in the context of their impact on the territorial integrity of the Ottoman Empire in Asia. For the British government, the aim was not to maintain the Ottoman Empire for the sake of the Ottomans. The aim was to maintain it so as to prevent Russia from expanding southwards towards the Persian Gulf and thus becoming a menace to the 'overland route' or the short sea route to India. Millman is right when he says that Salisbury gave 'lip service' in both his pact with Russia and the Convention with the Porte 'to preserving civilized government for Ottoman subjects in both Europe and Asia'. Here too the British government genuinely wanted an improvement in the condition of the Christians in Armenia, not because of humanitarian concerns but because of the realisation that a contented population could be the best bulwark against Russian expansion. Millman's assessment is a typical example of presenting a painstaking account of foreign policy *sans* the real perception of the interests it was supposed to protect and promote. Contemporary records, both secret and public, are replete with references that underline the determination of the British government to maintain the Raj and also to stem the tide of Russia's advance towards the Mediterranean, the Persian Gulf and towards any other region on the route to India.

Overture from Bismarck

Bismarck's support for the Anglo-Austrian position at Berlin had created irritation in Russia. Disputes relating to the implementation of the Berlin settlement sustained this atmosphere of unconcealed animosity between the

two governments. During these disputes Britain and Austria tended to act together. In order to strengthen his position in relation to Russia, Bismarck signed a full-scale military alliance with Austria in the autumn of 1879. To ascertain what attitude the British government would take regarding it, he also placed suggestions for an Anglo-German alliance before Disraeli.[91] Such an alliance was likely to hold Russia in check and also to keep France quiet in case there was war between the eastern monarchies. In London, the proposal received mixed reactions. Many welcomed it as a means of keeping Germany and Russia apart. Others expressed fears that an alliance with the German government would make France apprehensive, and France would turn to Russia, thus making Britain's two rivals join hands. Meanwhile, in October, the signing of the Austro-German Alliance was announced. At London, its formation was viewed with unconcealed joy because it prevented resurrection of the Dreikaisersbund which had been Britain's nightmare. It isolated and hence restrained Russia from making a fresh move towards the Mediterranean or the north-west frontier of India.[92] After this, Britain did not see the need for an Anglo-German Alliance. Bismarck also did not discuss the matter after the first sounding, perhaps because there were hints from St Petersburg of a desire to improve relations with Germany.

This overture from Bismarck for an alliance between Britain and Germany thus came to nothing. Nevertheless, it showed that both the countries saw each other as 'useful' and 'friendly' states who could turn to each other in the event of an emergency. At the same time, they avoided developing tighter bonds. Disraeli did inform the Queen that Her Majesty's government was 'as free as air';[93] but the reason for not coming closer to Germany was deeper than this. Though both nations viewed Russia with extreme distrust, there was no congruence in their aims. For Germany, especially under Bismarck, it was far more important to have a friendly Russia than a friendly Britain because it reduced chances of war on the eastern front; in fact, on both fronts. Any agreement with Britain was likely to irritate Russia and thus increase chances of such a war. Britain wanted to befriend Germany, not because of any community of interest between them but only because it was likely to create estrangement between Russia and the central powers. This estrangement suited Britain because it was likely to keep Russia occupied in Europe, thus preventing Russia from expanding towards its east and south-east. This was likely to create security in a region where Britain least wanted to fight.

The Second Anglo-Afghan War

While trying to keep Russia away from the Mediterranean coast, the British government also made efforts to stem the tide of Russia's expansion in the direction of India by bringing Afghanistan under its umbrella. Salisbury had been the Secretary of State for India during 1866–7. In 1874, he was given the same portfolio. He became known for advocating a policy of restraint in Central Asia because of the advice he gave in June 1877 'to use large scale maps' for

assessing the distance between the Russian Empire and the Indian Empire. This soundbite lingered in the memory of generations of strategists and historians and was used for indicating that those who saw the ghost of Russia on the frontier of India were being unnecessarily alarmist. But Salisbury never trivialised the possibility of confrontation between Britain and Russia in Central Asia. The phrase referred to above was a calculated misstatement. He himself clarified to the Viceroy that he had used it to put balm on inflamed tempers, as 'a sedative' to make his policy acceptable.[94] During 1874–5, there was a virtual debate between the proponents of the Closed Border and Forward Schools. The most distinguished proponents of the Forward School – Sir Bartle Frere, Sir Robert Montgomery and Sir Henry Rawlinson – were members of the Council of India. When Salisbury became the Indian Secretary, the India Office was musty with the odour of their ideas. Salisbury was confronted with the plethora of memos on the Central Asian question. Soon after assuming office he decided to devote himself to a study of India Office Records.[95] Forty volumes of documents were placed before him, a task too enormous even for a man as diligent as Salisbury. In this situation he must have relied on the Historical Summary and conversations with his colleagues at the India Office, and could not have remained uninfluenced by their ideas. Salisbury became convinced that the position of the British in India was 'singularly unsuited, for purely defensive strategy'. He accepted that the concept of 'war with Russia all over the world' advocated by protagonists of the Closed Border School was misleading and meaningless because 'Russia knows perfectly well that she is unassailable by us'.[96] By 1876, Salisbury had developed such contempt for Lawrence's policy of 'masterly inactivity' that, as he confessed to Lord Lytton, he found it difficult even 'to sit next to Lawrence for two hours' when he thought of all the mischief his policy of 'masterly inactivity' had caused.[97] He believed that Britain could exercise pressure on Russia only through India, adding that 'that is the part of the question to which alone it is worthwhile to devote our thoughts'.[98]

After the flare up in the Near East in July 1875, the Conservative government watched Russia's moves in Central Asia with great anxiety. Salisbury contemplated the possibility of 'a serious embarrassment if there was trouble in Europe'. He added, 'unfortunately the probability of troubles in Europe increases with every week'.[99] He instructed Northbrook through official despatches and private letters to secure the admission of a mission or a Resident to Kabul. Through this step, as he wrote to his successor at the India Office Lord Cranbrook later, he hoped to make 'use of the favourable moment to extract what treaty stipulations we please' and hoped to dominate 'as completely as we do in Khelat or Zanzibar'.[100] In this matter, Salisbury showed a sense of urgency which was not reciprocated by the government of India under Lord Northbrook. As already said, Northbrook had opposed all suggestion of forcing the ruler of Afghanistan to accept a British Resident at Kabul.[101]

On Northbrook's resignation, Lord Lytton, who had been the British Minister at Lisbon, was appointed the Governor-General of India. His appointment came as a surprise even to Lytton himself. He had no experience of administration or

Indian affairs. This did not stand in the way of his appointment.[102] In view of the crisis in the Near East, it was considered advisable to have a person at Calcutta who would execute the policy laid down for him at London. He was handed over a letter in London itself containing future policy for him in India.[103] This letter was dated 28 February 1876 and, if sent through usual channels, it would have fallen in the hands of Northbrook who relinquished office only towards the end of March.[104] This despatch suggested a clear line of action. The Governor-General was instructed to get at least a temporary British mission received at Kabul and to ascertain the attitude of the Khan of Qalat, whose territory covered the whole of what became the province of Baluchistan. He was also to insist on the stationing of a permanent British Resident at Kabul. Immediately on his arrival in India, Lytton opened negotiations with Sher Ali on these issues.[105]

Meanwhile, in the summer of 1876, Serbia and Montenegro declared war on Turkey and gradually the possibility of Russia's joining the war increased. In these circumstances, as already mentioned, during October, Disraeli, Salisbury and Lytton thought in terms of opening a front against Russia in Central Asia.[106] In December, the government of India concluded a treaty with the Khan of Qalat by which the British got predominant influence in the province, security of the Bolan Pass and the right to occupy the town of Quetta, situated at a distance of some 400 kilometres beyond the then British frontier. Quetta was occupied in 1877. It was widely regarded as the bastion of frontal attack on Afghanistan and vital for carrying on trade with Central Asian countries. Its occupation was seen as an aggressive move even in British political circles.[107] This treaty enabled Britain to gradually occupy Baluchistan.

This move made Sher Ali apprehensive about British intentions, all the more so because the Indian government was showing indifference to his approaches for aid in case of attack by Russia on his country. The government of India demanded as proof of the Amir's trustworthiness that he station a British officer at Kabul. For this purpose, negotiations were carried on with the Afghan representative at Simla in October 1876 and at Peshawar during the first three months of 1877. These negotiations failed because Sher Ali was not ready to admit British officers into Afghanistan. He insisted, as he had been doing since 1868, that he could not guarantee the safety of a British Resident on account of the intense anti-foreign feelings of his subjects.[108] Thereafter, the Viceroy withdrew his *vakil*[109] from Kabul. To Salisbury, the Amir's attitude seemed to be of 'scarcely veiled hostility', and he authorised Lytton to protect British frontiers by such measures as circumstances should render expedient 'without regard to the wishes of the Amir or the interests of his dynasty'.[110]

In April 1877, the Russo-Turkish War began and British statesmen were faced with the prospect of seizure of Constantinople by Russia. Russia was simultaneously expanding in Central Asia. Russia occupied Kizzil Arvat on the route to Merv. This brought Russia within 800 kilometres of Herat. British statesmen expressed their consternation in belligerent tones. In a letter to the Queen, Disraeli wrote:

> It is Lord Beaconsfield's present opinion that in such case Russia must be attacked from Asia, that the troops should be sent to the Persian Gulf, and that the Empress of India should order her armies to clear Central Asia of Muscovites and drive them into the Caspian.[111]

Lytton pressed the British government to declare that 'England will regard the next step in advance as a *casus belli* and would send British officers to Merv to assist the Turkomans against the Russians.[112] At Constantinople, Layard, in close contact with Lytton and without informing the British Foreign Office, in the summer of 1877, arranged a Turkish mission to Afghanistan with a view to counteracting the influence of Russia'.[113] In India, in order to strengthen the government of India's position on the northern frontier, Lytton signed a treaty with the Maharaja of Kashmir under which the British got permission to establish a British agency at Gilgit and to lay a telegraph line from British India to Gilgit so as to watch the frontier from there.

Early in 1877, the Russo-Turkish War came to an end. The terms of the Treaty of San Stefano, as already stated, caused great resentment in Britain. Meanwhile, Russia decided to send a mission to Kabul to divert Britain's attention from the events in the Near East. The Amir resisted Russia's proposal and offered to send his own men to Tashkent for talks. But Kaufmann, the Russian Governor of Turkestan, refused to accept any such suggestion. In August, a Russian military mission under General Stolytov reached Kabul to negotiate a treaty with Afghanistan. Under the Treaty of 1873, Russia had accepted that Afghanistan was outside its sphere of influence.[114] By this time the Congress of Berlin had come to an end, and the Treaty of San Stefano had been revised to Britain's satisfaction. But this did not seem to assuage anxieties about the security of the Raj. The British government did not let the matter go. A more direct surveillance on Afghanistan was deemed necessary. The government of India decided that Sher Ali must accept a British mission as well. In September it sent a mission under a veteran officer, Sir Neville Chamberlain, without obtaining approval from London. The purpose of the mission was to make the Amir accept British control over external relations, to receive British officers whenever the British government thought desirable and accept the placement of a Resident at Kabul. Before this mission reached Peshawar on 12 September 1878, the Russian agent had left Kabul with a promise to return. Chamberlain was not allowed to enter Afghanistan. Thereupon the Viceroy sought permission to invade Afghanistan immediately.[115]

The government in London could not toss the matter aside. It was not just a question of affront to the government of India. It was one of checking Russia's advance towards India's frontier. There was such heated discussion in the Cabinet that Disraeli described this Cabinet meeting as 'one of the most remarkable meetings' of the Cabinet in his memory.[116] Many members of the Cabinet – Lord Chancellor Lord Cairns, Home Secretary R.A. Cross and Salisbury – expressed misgivings about the plan to invade Afghanistan. They all thought that their *casus belli* was not unimpeachable. Salisbury complained with

great bitterness that the Viceroy was 'forcing the hands of the government' and that he 'thought only of India and was dictating by its measures the foreign policy of the Government in Europe and Turkey'. Disraeli, on the other hand, had no doubt that what was needed at that moment was 'a demonstration of [the] power and determination of England'. He wanted to take policy decisions which, 'if necessary, will be of a very decisive character'. Ultimately all ministers, including Salisbury, decided to support Disraeli. The Cabinet advised the Governor-General to send another message to the Amir, not for exploring the possibility of avoiding war but with a view 'to strengthen our case for Parliament'. Disraeli also reported that 'the military preparations were ordered to be continued and completed…' Thereafter the Cabinet directed the Viceroy to require from the Amir 'in temperate language an apology and acceptance of a permanent mission within the Afghan territory'.[117] The ultimatum was despatched on 31 October, requiring him to tender an apology for his conduct by 20 November. On 21 November, columns of the Indian army marched simultaneously towards Kabul and Kandahar.

The expedition was successful. By the end of January 1879, southern Afghanistan had passed into the hands of the British and Sher Ali's power was completely crushed. He fled, and died soon after. His son Yakub Khan established himself on the throne at Kabul. The British signed a treaty with him in May 1879 which is known as the Treaty of Gandamak. Under this, Yakub Khan agreed to accept a British Resident at Kabul and to cede the districts of Pishin, Sibi and Khurram valley to the British. In July 1879, Cavagnari reached Kabul as Resident. But the Afghans refused to accept such a handling of their fate. There was widespread revolt. On 3 September all members of the British Residency at Kabul were murdered by Afghan soldiers, aided by civilians. Another expedition was sent to Afghanistan, and after a bloody campaign, Kabul was recaptured. In the northern region and in the area around Kandahar, fighting continued. The Russians did not retaliate against this invasion; in December 1879 they withdrew their mission and disavowed their treaty with Sher Ali. But this did not make the British withdraw. Instead, in April 1880, with the approval of Lord Cranbrook, Lytton initiated a policy of breaking up Afghanistan, ceding Herat to Persia and detaching Kandahar from Kabul. But this policy was rejected because occupation was proving very expensive. The bloodshed and huge costs involved revived the memories of the debacle of 1842. The Cabinet became so desperate that it would have preferred to let the Afghan problem remain unresolved rather than prolong its occupation. It decided to withdraw. By this time Abdur Rahman, one of the grandsons of Dost Mohammad, had won over the Afghan troops in Afghan Turkestan and showed promise of winning over the Afghans. Negotiations were opened with him,[118] but before these could be finalised, Disraeli's government fell.

The accepted opinion on the Second Afghan War has been that it was Lytton, 'the man on the spot', who disobeyed orders and forced the hand of the government. Answering a question in Parliament, Disraeli himself stated that 'hands of the Home Government had been forced by the inopportune haste of

the Indian Government, who had precipitated the matter'.[119] Historians have tended to endorse this opinion.[120] But a study of the Afghan question in the context of Britain's relations with European powers, particularly Russia, shows that the origins of the Second Afghan War did not lie in the activities of a hawkish Viceroy compelling a reluctant Cabinet to declare war. Lytton's policy can be understood only in the context of the quickening beat of impulses transmitted from the metropole. The general policy at that time was of stemming the tide of Russian expansion towards the Aegean Sea, the straits, Mesopotamia and Persia as well as Afghanistan. A glance at Monypenny and Buckle shows that Disraeli was very keen 'to clear Central Asia of Muscovites'.[121] The entire tenor of Salisbury's policies also points in the same direction. As early as October 1875 he had written to Disraeli, 'I do not propose to send a mission to Afghanistan against the Amir's wishes, but I propose to tell the Government of India to make the Amir wish it'.[122] The British government wanted to act with some caution because of the bitter experience of the First Afghan War. But this was mingled with disdain because of the innate feeling of superiority amongst the rulers during this age of imperialism. Added to this was the determination to guard the Raj at all costs. The decision to invade Afghanistan was not an expedient hastily devised either by the government of India or the British Cabinet following alarm at Stolytov's mission. It was taken at a Cabinet meeting after cool consideration of likely effects, a report of which to the Queen covered sixteen pages.[123] The ministers did express misgivings, but Afghanistan was invaded because 'a demonstration of the power and determination of England' was considered necessary.

The war in South Africa

Britain had always taken any threat to its position around the Cape of Good Hope equally seriously. In 1870 there were four 'white' states in South Africa. Two were British colonies – the Cape Colony and Natal – and two were Afrikaner (Boer) republics – Transvaal (South African Republic) and the Orange Free State. The British government felt insecure because the nearby African kingdom of the Zulus was becoming highly organised and ambitious. The Zulus resisted any attempt by the 'white' people to increase their influence. In 1872, Gladstone's government granted self-government to the Cape Colony. It hoped that the new Cabinet there would take the initiative in cajoling the three neighbouring 'white' states to submerge their regional sovereignties and form a federation. But the Boers were unwilling. Even the government of the Cape Province was not ready to shoulder the financial and defence burdens of the less affluent neighbours. Therefore, it remained hostile to the idea of a Federation. In spite of this, Natal was incorporated in six months' time. In 1877 Transvaal and the Orange Free State also joined the federation because they feared destruction at the hands of the Zulus.

In 1877, Sir Bartle Frere was appointed Governor of the Cape Province and High Commissioner for South Africa. He made plans to expand Britain's authority as far as the River Zambezi and beyond, to strengthen imperial

defence along the coasts of South Africa and to delimit Portuguese claims in the east and west. Destruction of the power of the Zulus seemed to him to be a prerequisite for establishing British supremacy in this region. In view of the preoccupation with the war in Afghanistan, London showed reluctance to extend support. But ultimately the reinforcements Frere asked for were sent and Zululand was invaded. This army suffered a crushing defeat at Isandhlwana in 1879. Thereafter, the government at London sent large additional reinforcements. The Zulus were defeated and their power was broken by dividing their territory amongst thirteen chiefs.

British historians continue to argue that the Prime Minister and his Colonial Secretary, Michael Hicks Beach, were blissfully ignorant of what was happening and that this war was 'a perfect example of that dynamic which, once established, drove local officials ever in search for imperial security'.[124] But in appointing Bartle Frere as 'the man on the spot', the British government had ensured that an expansionist policy would be followed. As the governor of Bombay Presidency from 1867 to 1877, he had stood in the front rank of administrators who had advocated a 'Forward Policy' towards the north-west frontier of India. In 1872 he had ruthlessly 'suppressed' the slave trade in Zanzibar. A policy of restraint was the last thing that could be expected from such a person.

Disraeli failed to turn his success at the Congress into a political triumph. From the height of its popularity in the summer of 1878, things went downhill for the Conservative government. Military reversals in Afghanistan and Zululand tarnished the ministry's imperial record. In 1879 Gladstone returned to the centre of political debate with a vengeance. He decided to stand in Midlothian (the constituency around Edinburgh) and mounted a vigorous and demagogic campaign centring on the excrescences of what he called 'Beaconsfieldism'. By this time the country was in the grip of a chronic recession. In 1879 an agricultural depression also set in. As a result, the Conservative government was called upon to handle a steadily worsening economy, declining revenues and hard times for the common man. The general election of 1880 resulted in an unexpected but decisive victory for the Liberals, who formed a government under Gladstone.

During his tenure Disraeli had re-launched the Conservative Party as the national party and Britain as a great imperial power. He looked upon the Indian Empire as a magnificent possession. In fact, all British governments did. They always acted with alacrity whenever they perceived any threat, howsoever remote, to its frontiers or the routes to it. Disraeli made the difference in doing it in a pompous manner. He drew upon its strength to claim weight for Britain at international forums. His entire external policy, one way or the other, centred on the Indian connection. One question that caused deep anxiety was the crisis in the Near East. During this crisis, the British government seemed to swing between the two extremes of contemplating the partition of the Ottoman Empire and working for its continuation. But these swings were not indicative of lack of consistency in policy; rather they were indicative of the grave panic that gripped not just the government of the day but the entire nation at the prospect

of Russia reaching the Mediterranean and the consciousness of the lack of means to stem this expansion. For the British government, the real issue was not the future of the Ottomans. Nor was it, its likely effect on relations with other European powers. Historians have tended to argue that Disraeli used the Eastern Question 'to assert Britain's prestige' and 'to end Britain's position of diplomatic isolation'.[125] Bernard Porter, for example, says that to Disraeli the most satisfying result of the Eastern crisis was that the Dreikaisersbund of Germany, Austria and Russia was 'both weakened and upstaged'.[126] But, for Britain, as for any other state, relations with the neighbouring countries were a means to an end. The aims were to prevent any strong power from acquiring control over the Eastern Mediterranean region, and to sustain a regime that would be amenable to Britain's influence. It was only when the latter alternative seemed unattainable that the British government entertained thoughts of partition. The most satisfying results of this phase of the crisis were that Russia was prevented from establishing itself along the Aegean Sea, that ways were devised to stem Russia's advance towards the Persian Gulf and that Cyprus was acquired.

The government was supported enthusiastically by the Members of Parliament, press and the people. Many Liberal MPs also supported it. As early as August 1876, *The Times* commented that colonial as well as foreign policy had settled into a system which was independent of party tendencies.[127] Even Gladstone had no illusion about the widespread support that Disraeli's policy was receiving. 'I am acting in the Eastern Question against the Government, the Clubs, the London press (in majority), the majority of both Houses, and five-sixths or nine-tenths of the plutocracy of the country. These make up a great power', he wrote.[128] In this context, the Indian question came up so frequently that Florence Nightingale commented: 'The Houses of Parliament now discuss India as if it were a home question, a vital and moral question, as it is'.[129] Disraeli's foreign policy initiatives were approved enthusiastically by the people. By offering 'glory', he made them identify with 'the great nation' possessing a far flung empire, of which India was the omphalos. In the process, the newly enfranchised electors began to identify the Conservative Party with patriotism.

As a result of the policies advocated and pursued during this period, a feeling had begun to emerge that Britain's Empire was both legitimate and beneficial and had to be preserved. By the 1880s, 'the new imperialism' was in full bloom with the publication of John Seeley's *The Expansion of England* in 1883 and John Fronde's *England and Her Colonies* in 1886, and the foundation of the Imperial Federation League in 1884. It is true that Gladstone's brilliant Midlothian campaign produced success for the Liberal Party. But, as we shall see in the next chapter, despite promises to 'reconstitute' foreign policy on the basis of 'peace, retrenchment and non-aggression', even Gladstone's policies produced similar, in fact more tangible, results.

3 In the garb of moral imperatives, 1880–5

In April 1880, the Liberals came to power with an overwhelming majority after a prolonged moralistic and demagogic electoral campaign spearheaded by Gladstone. This success was seen not just as an electoral triumph of Gladstone, but as an electoral triumph of Gladstonian liberalism based on the economics of free trade, politics of liberalism and morality of Christian virtues. Generations of British historians have accepted that Gladstone sought to apply the standards of morality, which would be normal in private life, to international affairs and that this hampered the pursuit of national interests.[1] In Midlothian in 1879, Gladstone had specified his version of the 'right principles of foreign policy'. He defined these as (1) good government at home, (2) cultivating the Concert of Europe, (3) avoidance of entangling engagements, (4) the preservation to the nations of the world the blessings of peace, (5) acknowledging equal rights for all nations, and (6) promoting the love of fredom.[2] An analysis of British foreign policy during his tenure as prime minister, however, shows that these principles were observed more in their breach and that there was a very wide gap between the idealism of Gladstone's words and the realism of his actions.

Under the very first principle, Gladstone made a commitment to devote himself to internal matters. He had criticised the excesses of Tory jingoism and had accused the party of unwarranted emphasis on external policies and neglect of domestic concerns. He was known for his interest in financial and legislative matters. Further, his second tenure in office was bedevilled by domestic struggle over the Irish question. Yet, Gladstone's second ministry remained barren of any achievement in the domestic sphere. The next two principles mainly concerned Britain's relations with European states. His efforts to cultivate the Concert of Europe were not likely to produce positive results when Germany and France were suspicious, Russia uncertain, and Austria and Turkey hostile. Though desirous of avoiding entangling engagements, Gladstone was no apostle of non-intervention. 'He used military and naval force coolly and without embarrassment', comments H.C.G. Matthew, who studied Gladstone's diaries very closely.[3] Every Cabinet that he had sat in since 1843 had despatched a military expedition.[4] The other three principles seemed to be of universal application. But, in reality, 'the blessings of peace', 'rights of all nations' and 'the

love of freedom' applied to the 'white' people only. He did not disapprove of expansion into non-white regions of the world, and on two occasions he publicly welcomed the acquisition of colonies by Germany.[5]

On Gladstone's imperial policy, Matthew puts the received view in a nutshell: 'Gladstone sought no expansion of his Imperial responsibilities.'[6] During the election campaigns, Gladstone had carried on a virtual tirade against Disraeli's forward policies on the north-west frontier of India, and in South Africa, Egypt and the Near East. He had denounced the 'system of annexations designed to ... forestall other countries'.[7] He had committed himself to restoring independence to the Boers and withdrawing from Cyprus, Asia Minor and Afghanistan. But any appraisal of Gladstone's policies has to stem from what he actually did, not from what he sought to do. The policies that he adopted proved to be more in line with what he said about Englishmen in general: 'The sentiment of Empire may be called innate in every Briton. If there are exceptions, they are like those of men born blind or lame among us. It is part of our patrimony: born with our birth, dying only with our death…'[8] The policies that he followed show that Gladstone was a 'Briton' without any reservations. Once in office, 'upright' and 'satiated' Gladstone proved no different from 'aggressive' and 'pompous' Disraeli. Gladstone acted on the principle that imperial possessions had to be defended. The Indian Empire was the most precious of them. His attitude towards India was in line with his attitude towards international relations in general – evasive, hesitant and ambivalent. Gladstone had said that India did not add anything to the strength of the empire while it added immensely to the responsibility of the government.[9] Yet, whatever he thought about Ireland, he never proposed leaving India, if only on the ground that Britons had undertaken 'a most arduous but a noble duty' of spreading Western civilisation and ensuring law and order.[10]

Internally, despite a decisive victory in the elections, despite enjoying a majority of 100 in the House of Commons, and despite commitment to a policy of reform, Gladstone's second administration did not begin in a climate of confidence. New social forces, represented by the extension of franchise and the rise of trade unions, were making influential sections of the Liberal Party turn towards the Conservative Party. Many were keen to shift towards a strong foreign policy as a means of showing that their party could be as patriotic as the Conservatives in defending Britain's presence abroad.[11] This group was headed within the Cabinet by Hartington, who was India Secretary during 1880–2 and War Secretary from 1882 to 1885, and outside by Sir Charles Dilke, the under secretary for foreign affairs. The Radicals and Irish nationalists, on the other hand, were opposed to a 'moral' pursuit of national interests. In fact, the dissensions within the Cabinet were so intense that there were prolonged discussions, often without any decision. The Queen distrusted the Prime Minister, whom she described as a 'half-mad fire-brand'.[12] Besides, Gladstone repeatedly threatened to resign. This lent a sense of the transitory to the government. Above all, it was the gap between idealistic professions and actual policies that form the hallmark of this period.

Settlement after the Second Afghan War

Immediately on assuming office, the Liberals were called upon to deal with the situation in Afghanistan. During the election campaign, the Liberals had promised to reverse the policy of the Conservative government. On assuming office, they recalled Lytton. This was taken as symbolic of a change in policy. It might be repeated here that in view of the difficulties of controlling Afghanistan, even the Conservatives had started withdrawing their army from the country and had begun to explore the possibility of making Abdur Rahman the Amir of Kabul. As a result, when Lord Ripon, the new Viceroy, took charge on 8 June 1880, Kabul was virtually without a government, Herat was in hostile hands and Britain's hold over Kandahar was uncertain. To top all this, during the last week of July 1880 the British-Indian army suffered a crushing defeat at Maiwand to the north of Kandahar, leaving 1,000 dead on the field.[13]

Still, there were many who wanted to retain Kandahar.[14] They believed that this would enable them to negotiate with Russia on favourable terms because the Russians took as much alarm at Britain's advance to Kandahar as the British did at Russia's advance towards Merv.[15] Some wanted to expand for commercial reasons. Napier of Magdala wrote from Gibraltar, 'A safe road to Kandahar will give it a clear start, and, instead of purchasing Russian articles at Peshawar we shall deliver British manufactures to Central Asia.'[16] The Cabinet was divided. Northbrook, who had been the Governor-General of India and was at this time the First Lord of the Admiralty, and the Duke of Argyll, the India Secretary, were in favour of withdrawing while Hartington remained neutral and Gladstone was uninterested.[17] As a result, on the issue of Kandahar, no clear directive was given to Ripon.[18] It was generally accepted that the districts of Pishin and Sibi should be retained. A railway had been opened from the River Indus to Sibi, while work on the railway from Pishin to Sibi had already started.[19]

After assuming office, Ripon signed a treaty with Abdur Rahman recognising him as the Amir of Kabul. The British 'temporarily' retained the two districts of Pishin and Sibi. The Amir agreed to conduct relations with foreign powers through the government of India. In return, the government of India agreed to aid the Amir in case of unprovoked aggression on Afghanistan.[20] Ripon soon began to think in terms of uniting Kabul and Kandahar if the Amir of Kabul proved strong enough. By 1881, Amir Abdur Rahman was able to capture Herat and Kandahar, and thereafter he was recognised as the Amir of Afghanistan and its dependencies. The British army evacuated Kandahar in April 1881. From 1883, an annual subsidy of twelve lakhs of rupees was given to him. Thus, the Liberals who had condemned the Afghan war as 'an example of reckless aggression unworthy of a civilized government' not only brought Afghanistan within British orbit but also helped themselves to two districts in the northwest, Pishin and Sibi.[21] At that time it was emphasised that the occupation of Pishin and Sibi was to be temporary, a kind of trust to be handed back when the situation became favourable. But these districts were annexed irrevocably to the British Empire in 1887. In his study of Anglo-Afghan relations during this period, D.P. Singhal comments that 'the irony of the situation is that these districts were

never to be returned to Afghanistan'.[22] In fact, there was no irony involved. The Conservative government had 'occupied' Cyprus 'temporarily' while the Liberals were to 'occupy' Egypt 'temporarily'. The difference lay in the fact that while the occupations of Cyprus and Egypt continued to be 'temporary' for decades, Pishin and Sibi were annexed 'irrevocably' to the British Empire barely five years later. One reason was that the British government did not have to offer justifications to any European power for its actions in this region. The professions of the Liberal Party, the commitment of its leaders, and the prospect of settlement with Russia were all subordinated to the desire to obtain what had been described as 'scientific frontier' for the Indian Empire.

Gladstone and the Concert of Europe

Gladstone made efforts to cultivate the Concert of Europe to settle those issues in the Near East concerning smaller states which had remained unresolved since 1878. But his efforts in this direction did not succeed, for two reasons. One was that at that time European governments tended to distrust Britain's Liberal government. They saw in Gladstone's advocacy of concerted action a desire to assert Britain's power. Bismarck thought that Gladstone typified many of the vices that he saw in his Liberal opponents at home.[23] He also feared that such a concert would, in practice, amount to a London–Paris–St Petersburg axis. Austria was hostile. The basis of Anglo-Austrian collaboration had been their common interest in the continuation of the Ottoman Empire. Gladstone had removed that base when he had described Russia as the liberator of the Bulgars, and had thus taken a pro-Russian stand. The Russian government had found this stance gratifying, but it continued its expansion towards the Indian frontier and this caused anxiety in London. France had been co-operating with Britain under the Conservatives. As Balfour put it later, 'a working compromise in a shared hegemony at Cairo and Constantinople had emerged'.[24] But the two powers had differences over many issues. Internally, the Anglo-French trade agreement of the early 1860s was due for renewal. The Protectionists in France resented this treaty and described it as grasping and selfish.[25] The question of Egypt exacerbated differences between the two countries. In the Near East, France did not want to co-operate in any policy of coercing Turkey because it had set its eyes on Tunis, and any anti-Turk policy was likely to offend the Muslims there. Relations with Italy were no better. In 1878, Salisbury had given promises of support to Waddington, the French representative at Berlin, regarding Tunis. When France annexed Tunis in 1881 to the annoyance of Italy, Italy came to know of these promises.[26] This made Italy resentful. The Ottoman government, too, was not likely to co-operate with Gladstone, who had denounced it most unequivocally during 1875–8. Historians now accept that despite the noises that Gladstone made about the Bulgarian horrors, he did not really want the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire.[27] He merely wanted 'pruning of the rotten bough to maintain the tree', as H.C.G. Matthew puts it.[28] But the Ottoman government harboured nothing but distrust of the intentions of Gladstone's government.

The other reason for non-fulfilment of Gladstone's vision of working through a Concert of European Powers was that when European diplomats did get down to brass tacks, Britain did not show any propensity to compromise on issues that in any way touched his primacy over the entire region lying on the route to India. In 1878, Montenegro had been promised the town of Dulcigno which was under the Ottomans. Greece had been promised some portion of Epirus and Thessaly, though the actual area was not specified. The Ottomans were not inclined to part with these territories. They handed over Dulcigno only when Gladstone proposed a blockade of the town. The question of providing compensation to Greece did not prove easy to resolve. But a suggestion made by C.J. Goschen, who had been the First Lord of Admiralty and was temporarily ambassador at Constantinople at this time, gives an interesting insight into the attitude of the Liberal government. To compensate Greece, Bismarck suggested the transfer of Crete as an equivalent of Thessaly. The King of Greece refused to accept this. Goschen thereupon tried to persuade Britain and Turkey that in addition to Crete, Cyprus be given to Greece. He wrote:

> … if Cyprus were thrown in with the present Turkish proposal…peace ought to be certain; Europe grateful, Turkey convinced of indisputable disinterestedness and England relieved in a most honourable way of the Convention which Mr Gladstone called an act of madness.[29]

The arguments were irrefutable and should have impressed the Liberal government if it was serious about dispensing justice and sincere about condemning the Conservatives for high-handedness. But the Honourable Prime Minister remained unmoved. Arguments were discovered for retaining Cyprus. It was said that at the time the government had adopted a policy of retreat in Afghanistan and South Africa, surrender of Cyprus would adversely affect Britain's prestige. Needless to add, the same reasons applied for retaining Cyprus which had led to its occupation in 1878, the need to have a base of operations in the eastern Mediterranean east of Malta.[30] While deciding not to surrender control over Cyprus, Gladstone's government abandoned the other half of the settlement regarding ameliorating the condition of Christians in Armenia. It decided to withdraw British 'consuls' from there. This was not any act of renunciation. Even the Conservative government had realised that their appointment was proving expensive financially as well as politically, the latter because the Turks as well as the Armenians looked upon them as unwelcome interlopers. Gladstone put forward the argument that the surest way of achieving the desired objective was to make it a concern of the European Concert. Gladstone's solicitude for the downtrodden Christians did not stand in the way of relinquishing the opportunity of improving the condition of the Armenians.

Similarly, disregarding his commitment to the principle of self-determination, Gladstone became a party to the suppression of the movement of Bulgars in Eastern Roumelia for union with Bulgaria. The reason was the apprehension that various European powers were working to establish their influence over this

region that the British had always regarded as of vital interest to them. Russia's policy had been of expansion towards the Mediterranean. But at this stage, Dufferin, who was the ambassador at Constantinople at that time, suspected that the Germans wanted to acquire influence at Constantinople. He wondered: 'Can't it be that Bismarck's project for a colonising railway to Baghdad with the view of preventing the emigration of Germans to America is being revived?'[31] He also suspected that Austria was being egged on to turn its eyes eastwards by Bismarck and his friends.[32] In an atmosphere full of such anxiety, the Liberal government thought it best not to assist in the process that could lead to establishment of a bigger political unit.

The developments on the international scene during 1881–2 ruined whatever prospects there were of co-operation between the European powers that Gladstone had envisaged. On 18 June 1881, Bismarck, who had looked upon the Austro-German alliance as a step in the direction of improving relations with Russia, not only renewed the Dreikaisersbund but turned it into an alliance. It provided that in case of war between Britain and Russia, Austria and Germany would remain neutral. The three powers agreed not to oppose the union of the two Bulgarian principalities created at Berlin in 1878. It further provided that they would oppose the opening of the Straits to British warships by threatening the Sultan with further dismemberment of the empire.[33] All these terms were seen as antagonistic to British interests. By its very existence, this alliance enhanced Russia's sense of security on its western frontier, enabling it to concentrate on expansion in Central Asia, i.e., from the British point of view towards the frontier of the Indian Empire. At the same time, by blocking the Royal Navy's entry into the Straits it made Britain's strategy of putting pressure on Russia from the Crimea redundant. These terms led directly to Penjdeh.

In May 1882, Bismarck brought Italy within his diplomatic orbit by forming the Triple Alliance of Germany, Austria-Hungary and Italy. This also meant that the two liberal states of the West alone were excluded. However, relations between Britain and France became very tense after the 'occupation' of Egypt by Britain in 1882.

The conquest of Egypt

In 1882, Gladstone's government sent a very efficiently organised expedition to Egypt and established control over the country. This remains one of the most controversial events of Gladstone's government and forms a classic case study of neo-imperialism.

Sale of shares of the Suez Canal in 1875 did not solve the financial problems of Khedive Ismail, particularly because he simultaneously attempted to develop and modernise his country at an accelerated pace.[34] In 1876 he suspended the payment of his debt while European powers intensified their efforts to make the Egyptian government pay its debt. As a result, the years following were characterised by endless negotiations and nearly inextricable financial problems.[35] In this situation the economic condition of the people

became worse. Unemployment, indebtedness and, hence, discontent increased. The notables, especially in the provinces, were irked by loss of their privileged positions. All these ultimately provoked anti-foreign reactions. In February 1879, there was a demonstration by army officers, after which the Conservative government seriously thought in terms of some military action. It might have done so had its troops not been tied down against the Zulus in South Africa.[36] In this situation, when Khedive Ismail expressed displeasure at the attitude of the European powers, they pressurised the Sultan at Constantinople into deposing him in favour of his son Tawfiq, who seemed more amenable to their influence.

In July 1880, to settle Egypt's debts and finances, European powers signed a complicated Law of Liquidation. Under the arrangements made, 66 per cent of the revenue of the state was assigned to the budget for the debt. This income was put in the hands of a Debt Commission representing Britain, France, Germany, Austria and Italy. Britain and France together had a majority of votes.[37] The remainder of the revenue was left nominally in the hands of the Egyptian government for administrative purposes. The result of these financial arrangements was, as Alfred Milner, a journalist who later became associated with the administration of Egypt, commented, that Egypt was financially 'almost unable to breathe without the consent of Europe'.[38] Within Egypt, this step increased disillusionment with the foreigners as well as with their own collaborationist government. Increasing unrest marked the years 1881–2. Early in 1881, Ahmed Urabi Pasha emerged as the symbol of national hopes. He demanded reform of the existing political system and condemned interference by foreign powers.[39] The occupation of Tunis by France in 1881 seemed to expose the aggressive intentions of European powers. In September 1881 Urabi led an insurrection, demanding dismissal of all ministers, promulgation of a fresh constitution and an increase in the size of the army.

Initially, informed Englishmen, including the Liberals under Gladstone, believed that what they confronted in Egypt was a recognisably modern broad-based nationalist movement.[40] But as soon as the governments of Britain and France realised that the movement was directed against intervention by European powers, they changed their attitude and decided to intervene to suppress this movement. On 8 January 1882 they issued a 'Joint Note' in which they declared to Tawfiq that his maintenance on the throne was considered by them indispensable to the welfare of Egypt. The nationalists saw in this note a thinly veiled threat of military intervention, but they were not intimidated. Months of criss-cross negotiations followed in which all powers took some part. In Egypt, meanwhile, the Chamber of Delegates began to demand a share in earmarking that part of the Egyptian budget which was not committed to the payment of interest on the debt.[41] There were anti-establishment riots and demonstrations. On 31 January 1882, Tawfiq promulgated a new constitution and made Urabi the minister for war. In this situation, the British government came under increasing pressure to intervene from British residents in Egypt – officials, businessmen, journalists, and others. They were worried about their

positions, property, trade and investments. Their chief complaint was not that Egypt was sliding into anarchy but that the Khedive was not able to break the power of Urabi and his supporters.[42] The appeal was, of course, made in the garb of the moral duty of Englishmen to spread the 'blessings' of 'modern' civilisation in Egypt. It is significant that in the original draft of public statement on the question of invasion of Egypt, it was admitted that intervention had been necessitated by the attempt made by the Egyptians to demand control over the budget. On second thoughts this passage was removed.[43]

For bondholders in Britain, the prospect of a hostile nationalist government in Egypt was unnerving. The Corporation of Foreign Bondholders mobilised *The Times*, the financial press and those members of Parliament who had a financial stake in Egypt's economy.[44] One of these bondholders was the Prime Minister himself; no less than 37 per cent of his total portfolio was invested in Egyptian stock in 1882.[45] Thus, a man of Gladstone's expertise in financial matters had invested more than a third of his portfolio in stock dependent on the credit of a regime which he had tirelessly denounced for its untrustworthiness and deceit. This was the background in which, in May 1882, Britain and France sent their fleets to Alexandria to intimidate the nationalists.[46] This had the predictable result of provoking patriotic demonstrations not just in Alexandria, and Cairo but throughout Egypt. On 11 June there were riots in Alexandria which left fifty Europeans dead and over sixty wounded, the British Consul among them. These riots sounded alarm bells in London. It is significant that, despite the pressures imposed by the weight of external indebtedness, the Khedive was able to quell these riots on his own and restore order.[47] There was no general collapse into 'anarchy'. During this period, Urabi and his supporters began fortifying Alexandria and strengthened coastal artillery. Seymour, the British Admiral there, saw in these attempts a threat to the fleets of European powers. By the end of June the Admiralty, the War Office and the India Office began to recommend action on the ground that the route to India was in danger.[48] At this stage Gladstone vociferously expressed his misgivings about invading Egypt, but he gave sanction for the bombardment of Alexandria. On 3 July Admiral Seymour received authority to silence the guns and destroy the earthworks if fortification of Alexandria continued.

The British government went ahead in a most determined manner. On 11 July, the British navy bombarded the fort at Alexandria for ten and a half hours continuously, reportedly killing 2,000 Egyptians. Alexander Schölch shows that this action was designed to precipitate a crisis at a favourable moment.[49] At this point, the French drew back and the French fleet sailed away. Italy also decided to abstain, but the British government persisted. Robinson and Gallagher have taken great pains to show that the British government was moved by its concern that abstention would allow France 'to steal a march on them at Cairo'.[50] But French pressure was non-existent after late January, when Frecynet came to power. H.C.G. Matthew, from Gladstone's diaries, draws the conclusion that 'no expression of regret or reluctance qualified Gladstone's determination'.[51]

The bombardment of Alexandria failed to destroy the Egyptian artillery.

What was more important, it failed to destroy the spirit of the Egyptians. The 'insurgents' cut the telegraph lines at Alexandria between Britain and India, making the Red Sea cables useless. This was viewed as a grave matter, for it threatened communication between London and Calcutta.[52] It also highlighted that power, if not authority, continued to pass from the Khedive and his ministers to Urabi and his supporters. Therefore, the British government decided to invade Egypt. Ostensibly, this expedition was sent at the behest of Khedive Tawfiq to assist him in putting down a rebellion led by Urabi. But until the bombardment of Alexandria on 11 July, the Khedive had in fact supported Urabi. It was only on 16 July that the British Consul, Cartwright, informed Lord Granville telegraphically that the Khedive had dismissed Urabi as Minister of War and forbidden all Egyptians to aid him.[53] It is notable that Gladstone, who had expressed his discomfort about having to defend the bombardment of Alexandria in the House of Commons, endorsed this decision to invade Egypt barely nine days later. The members of the House of Commons, too, sanctioned an expenditure of £2,300,000 for the expedition on 27 July. The vote was passed by 275 to 19 votes.[54] The motion was supported overwhelmingly, even though the then Prime Minister, setting aside all financial canons of Liberal ideology, proposed to provide this amount by increasing the income tax by three and a half pence. On the contrary, in France, two days later, when Frecynet's ministry asked for a vote of credit for expedition to the Canal, the motion was defeated. After the fall of Gambetta towards the end of January 1882, the French had tended to retreat from a forward policy in Egypt while Britain tended to go ahead. France's policy has been explained in terms of change of government at Paris.[55] But the differences in the attitudes of the British and French governments were not the result of accidents of French politics. Robinson and Gallagher have rightly stated the reason: 'Commercially and strategically, the waterway was important to so many British interests that its safety was generally accepted as a vital national concern. For the French, on the other hand, Arabi's revolt did not seem a serious danger to national security.'[56] France's main interest lay in ensuring security on the Rhine frontier. The Italians too refused to join the British. The Ottoman ruler attempted to intervene. But the British stopped him from doing so.

The expedition to Egypt was planned with enthusiasm and 16,400 troops were sent from Britain with great promptitude and all needful supplies. An army was also called from India. In fact, a government expressly elected for its opposition to imperialist policies made arrangements to make the British and Indian armies each travel 5,000 kilometres in order to attack the Egyptian army in its own land. On 13 September, this army, led by Sir Garnet Wolseley, destroyed the Egyptian defences at Tel-el-Kebir and followed this up with a successful attack on Cairo. 'Only' 450 British soldiers died. 'There was never a tidier operation'; comments Sir Robert Ensor.[57] Within a day the Egyptian army was completely routed and Ahmed Urabi surrendered. This was seen as a spectacular exhibition of Britain's power. After Tel-el-Kebir, Gladstone was a jubilant man.[58] He celebrated the triumph enthusiastically. He asked the Archbishop of York and the

Bishop of London to have the church bells rung. He instructed the War Secretary to have the guns fired in London parks.[59] On their return, the troops were welcomed with obvious enthusiasm. Gladstone also recommended a peerage for Wolseley.

Urabi was imprisoned and the Khedive was reinstated. The British 'occupied' Egypt 'temporarily'. Gladstone announced that the country would be evacuated as soon as the Canal was safe and Egyptians were able to manage their financial affairs. The British government quickly moved to dismantle the vestiges of joint Anglo-French control in Egypt. As far as the Canal was concerned, Britain showed a readiness to enter into a guarantee with the other powers to preserve the freedom of the Canal for the passage of all ships in any circumstances, but it reserved the right to defend the Canal from any act of aggression against Egypt as long as it was necessary for Britain.[60] The occupation attracted remarkably little criticism in Britain at that time. Most Liberals approved of intervention in 1882 to protect the Canal as they had applauded the purchase of shares in 1875, to protect 'the gate and key to India'.[61] Criticism came later when arguments were marshalled to show that the government had intervened to protect the interests of British bondholders who had been battening on Egypt.[62]

The received and accepted view on the 'occupation' of Egypt for almost a hundred years has been that Britain had no territorial ambitions in Egypt, that Britain was compelled to intervene because Egypt had become a corrupt and bankrupt state which was unable to maintain law and order, that Urabi, who opposed Khedive's power, was an unrepresentative mutineer, that 'men on the spot' forced the hands of the government in London, and that Gladstone's government intervened most reluctantly when the French left the British government in the lurch. These views emerged contemporaneously during the propaganda campaign launched by the British government when the strategy of 'rescue and retire' was abandoned and the British government decided to 'stay' in Egypt.[63] These were sustained by historians who elaborated, refined and generalised these arguments. Robinson and Gallagher, in their well-documented, masterly and extremely influential study of the official mind on the partition of Africa, present a picture that closely resembles the official view.[64] They argue that 'each fateful step seemed to be dictated by circumstances rather than will'.[65] There was such a gap between public statements and decisions taken that even Sir Edward Malet, who presided over Anglo-Egyptian relations as Consul-General in Egypt from 1879 to 1883, confessed some twenty years later that he had not been able to discover the key to the enigma of the Liberal government's Egyptian policy in 1882.[66] Gladstone's reluctance to intervene and the consequent 'embarrassment' in Egypt is woven so neatly and obviously into contemporary records, accounts and perceptions that generations of historians have accepted (and still accept) that Gladstone, who 'occupied' Egypt, was an innocent idealist who came to believe in the propaganda of others and that he was outmanoeuvred by the 'hawks' in the Cabinet.[67] Eldridge, for example, comments that after Tel-el-Kebir the British were 'trapped'. He finds the jubilance of Gladstone after this victory 'surprising'.[68]

However, recent research shows that Egypt was not descending into anarchy, that the Khedive was able to quell the riots, that law and order in Egypt had not collapsed, that it was not the Egyptians who attacked the British fleet but the British Admiral Seymour who had bombarded Alexandria, that the British government persisted even when other powers held back, that the expedition to Egypt was meticulously planned, that Gladstone's diaries do not show any expression of regret or reluctance, that Gladstone's government acted in a most determined manner, and that the celebrations that followed the victory in Egypt were full of triumphalism. In short, the whole course of events during 1881–2 unfolds the saga of a determined and purposeful effort, not of an establishment afflicted with reluctance or of a person afflicted with moral qualms. Even Urabi could not be denounced as a mere rebel or a self-seeking opportunist. After these events the British government thought in terms of punishing Urabi. It is interesting that the issue was dropped when it was discovered that sufficient evidence could not be culled from the diaries captured after his surrender to support indictment of his complicity in the riots.[69]

The victories at Tel-el-Kebir, and then at Cairo, were so complete that the British government was in a position to declare either annexation or protectorate. The question arises: why did Britain decide merely 'to occupy' Egypt, not annex it, and that too 'temporarily'? The intention to withdraw on the part of the British government also persisted, as is obvious from the fact that as many as sixty-six official declarations to this effect were made.[70] It might be mentioned here that in international relations, temporary 'occupation' was in style at that time. Austria-Hungary had 'occupied' Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1878; Britain had 'occupied' Cyprus in the same year. In 1881, as already said, Britain 'occupied' Pishin and Sibi on the Northwest Frontier of India and at this stage Britain decided to 'occupy' Egypt. There were several reasons why Britain decided only to 'occupy' and not annex. One was that annexation would have been a more dramatic blow to the stability of the Ottoman Empire than 'temporary' military occupation. As the events of 1875–8 have shown, from the British point of view, a pliant Ottoman state was a better 'occupier' of the route to the East than Russia. Therefore, Britain did not want to be seen as working for the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire. Besides, Islamic law prohibits surrender of territory without war and any attempt to annex Egypt would have entailed a war with Turkey, which Britain wanted to avoid. In any case, 'occupation' seemed to ensure all the advantages of control while seemingly absolving the Liberal government of the charge of being an aggressor. Annexation would have been politically explosive. Under the arrangements made, Turkey remained the *de jure* sovereign power; the *de facto* situation was that the Khedive was under British control and Egypt became practically a British protectorate.[71] Britain did not to share power there with France. Egypt was supposed to revert to the Egyptians after its finances had been put in order. Repeated assurances of early evacuation did prove diplomatically tiresome, but control over Egypt was perceived as so important that the British preferred to remain 'entrapped' in the Egyptian 'house of bondage' and face embarrassment in European councils rather than consider evacuating it.

No one valued more highly the tradition of disinterested public service than Gladstone. He was always very sensitive to any suggestion that he had acted from anything less than the highest principles. His public statements have been repeated so often by so many historians that, even after the discovery of his assets drawn up in his own hands showing that Gladstone's personal holding of the Egyptian loan accounted for about 37 per cent of his portfolio, they are not ready to admit that Gladstone could have acted in self-interest. Despite unambiguous evidence available on this point, they refuse to pick up the key to the enigma of Gladstone's Egyptian imbroglio. Having noted the statement showing that a third of his portfolio was invested in Egypt, P.J. Cain and A.G. Hopkins comment: 'This is not to say that Gladstone was motivated by crude self-interest but it does suggest that he was likely to see the creditors' point of view with some clarity if it could be presented as an issue of principle, and especially one that was in the wider public interest.'[72] H.C.G. Matthew also absolves Gladstone of any charge of taking decisions in pursuit of self-interest.[73] He says that from the study of Gladstone's diaries he has not found any conscious awareness of any association between his personal investments and 'order' in Egypt. But the fact remains that the Liberal government under him acted in a most determined manner. This calls for some comments. One, Gladstone was capable of considerable self-deception. His teasing obsession with retirement and old age, while continuing in office at the same time, is one example of this. He was perhaps loath to acknowledge even to himself the sheer strength of his ambition or the intensity with which he enjoyed power and adulation. His diaries and letters do not show any awareness of association between his personal interests and the policy adopted in Egypt because he would not confess even to himself any such cogitation. Two, it was not as if in taking a strong line in Egypt Gladstone was promoting self-interest. That would be too crude a charge against a statesman as righteous as Gladstone is believed to be. But the fact remains that Gladstone invested his savings on the credit of a regime which he frequently denounced for its deceit and untrustworthiness. It certainly highlights that he knew that, given Britain's long-standing interests in Egypt, in the last resort, the British government would never abandon Egypt.

Now the crucial question arises: why was Gladstone so sure that in case of any threat to Khedive's government, the British government would act decisively in Egypt? Or, in other words, what were these interests that were so decisive? Two streams of arguments have been put forward in this context: one, economic and financial, and the other strategic. The former – the 'bondholders' thesis' – was advanced contemporaneously, most notably by W.S. Blunt, who argued that the reason for military operations in Egypt was the need to defend 'British pecuniary interests'.[74] Subsequently, the cotton factor was added. It was argued that Egypt provided the largest market in Africa for British cotton goods and supplied raw cotton to British cotton mills.[75] Cain and Hopkins emphasise the financial aspect. They say that the deeper origins lay in the expansion of European trade and investment after 1838, and especially in the growth of public sector borrowings from the 1860s. They say that Britain was the principal

creditor when Egypt slid into bankruptcy and also the principal trading partner taking, in 1880, 80 per cent of Egypt's exports and supplying 44 per cent of its imports.[76] Political motives have also been emphasised. It has been argued that the expedition had the effect of uniting the Liberal Party and rendering the Conservatives speechless.[77]

The motives for acquiring Egypt cannot be viewed in such narrow economic or political contexts, or in the context of developments in 1882, or even the preceding decade. From an economic point of view, Britain did have more than half the share of Egypt's total trade, Britain's share being £10.5 million out of 20 million. But what this argument camouflages is the fact that this was a very small fraction of Britain's total trade. Total imports and exports of Britain at this time amounted to £550 million, and thus Britain's trade with Egypt amounted to less than 2 per cent of its own total trade. Egypt was important to Britain because it lay astride the vital route to India. The strategic argument was repeatedly invoked. Northbrook, at that time the First Lord of Admiralty, wrote: 'As long as India remains under British rule the interests of England and of India…go far beyond the traffic in the Canal, for [they] demand that no other nation should be allowed to dominate Egypt.'[78] Gladstone himself described Egypt as 'our one really vulnerable point'.[79] He knew that the Canal could never be secure without Britain's domination as with it. To Ripon he wrote:

> Apart from the Canal, we have no interest in Egypt itself which could warrant intervention (in my opinion). But the safety of the Canal will not co-exist [?] with illegality and military violence in Egypt: and I doubt whether Parliament and the nation would have sanctioned, as they almost unanimously sanctioned, our proceeding, except for the Canal.[80]

No British statesman could forget that the Canal was the indispensable link between the Mediterranean fleet and the Indian army, the two great factors of power which backed British diplomacy both east and west of the Suez. The route was important for trade with the East in any case. By the end of the century, some 70 per cent of the tonnage that passed through Egypt was British. In the 1870s it was also discovered that Britain could procure Indian wheat through the Canal. Before this, the journey via the Cape had lasted five months, during which half the grain was lost. But after the opening of the Canal, wheat could be shipped in 25 days from Bombay to Marseilles. After 1878, India supplied over 10 per cent of the total import of wheat into Britain. This released Britain from dependence on imports from Russia and the USA.[81]

Historians tend to argue that while claims of sectional and economic interests could only divide the nation, the threat to the Canal was invoked because it served to unite it.[82] The Free Traders and Radicals in Gladstone's factitious Cabinet combined and extended their support when intervention was justified in the name of world communications, free trade and spread of civilisation. The question is, why was it accepted that the argument centring on the threat to the Canal would unite the nation? To say, as Scholch does, that the argument

about the safety of the Canal was put forward as an afterthought,[83] or to argue, as Hopkins does, that the Canal did not emerge as an issue until two weeks before the bombardment of Alexandria,[84] amounts to closing one's eyes to the coherence of the policy that the British government pursued in this region throughout the nineteenth century – a single-minded policy of preventing any hostile power from entrenching itself in the entire region across the route to India. It was Britain's concern about the route to India that explains Britain's policy in this region in 1798, 1815, 1839–40, 1853–4 and 1875–8. The manner in which the British government worked for obstructing the cutting of the Canal through the Isthmus of Suez, despite full consciousness of the advantages likely to accrue to Britain, shows that economic considerations were subsidiary to this strategic need.

Discussing Gladstone's views on empire, H.C.G. Matthew says: 'Strategic concern about "the route to India" was not one of his principles of foreign policy.'[85] But the point is that it could not just be one of the principles. Like the defence of the British Isles, continuation of control over the Indian Empire was perceived as a national interest. And national interests are generally not defined. They form the unspoken assumption of foreign policy. Britain did not invade Egypt because it was receiving adverse reports about the government in Cairo or because it had built up sufficient economic stakes in Egypt, but because control seemed to be slipping from Britain's hands into the hands of the 'xenophobic' patriots who showed a determination to rule their own country in their own way, and because the establishment of a nationalist regime in Cairo was seen as a threat to British control over the route to India and, hence, to Britain's Great Power status. The bondholders, the City and 'the man on the spot' could be effective because their own interests in investments, business and positions in Egypt chimed with the perception of Britain's national interest. In the case of Egypt one cannot even say that the actual happenings later belied the British government's anticipations. It was none other than Gladstone himself, who in 1877 as leader of the opposition, had said that, 'Our first site in Egypt will be the almost certain egg of a North African Empire that will grow and grow…'[86] Gladstone's government was more calculative and combative than Robinson's as Gallagher's reading of the evidence indicates.[87]

Expedition to Sudan

After establishing control over Egypt, the British government became involved in Sudan as well. Khedives of Egypt had ruled over Sudan for sixty years, but Egypt's hold over Sudan remained slender. Even before Britain's invasion of Egypt, Mohammad Ahmed had emerged as the 'Mahdi' or 'messiah' and had raised a banner of revolt against Egypt's domination. It was widely believed that control over Sudan was essential to keep the natural frontiers of Egypt secure. At this stage, however, the government at London decided not to interfere. Ultimately, Khedive Tawfiq raised an army to suppress the Mahdi, which was placed under the command of an English officer, William Hicks, and Sudan was

invaded. In the autumn of 1883 this army was massacred by the Mahdi's forces, which increased the power and prestige of the Mahdi. The British government could not remain indifferent to the Sudanese question because of its link with Britain's control over Egypt. Besides, as Rosebery, the Lord Privy Seal at that time, reminded his colleagues, success of a Muslim rebel was likely to have adverse effects on the prestige of Britain because the Queen, as the Empress of India, was the greatest of the Muslim powers.[88] He added that if the Mahdi succeeded in setting Arabia ablaze, the whole Eastern Question would be reopened.[89]

It also became clear that Egypt could not pay the cost of extensive operations. The British Cabinet decided to send an expedition to Sudan. General Charles Gordon was chosen for this purpose. He had the reputation for being experienced, incorruptible and at the same time, self-willed. He had been Governor-General of Sudan during 1877–80. He was not given any categorical instructions. He left London in January 1884. After initial success, he tried to pursue his own policy. By March he was out of direct telegraphic contact, perhaps deliberately.[90] The government was immersed in the issues relating to Ireland and parliamentary reform, but something had to be done to rescue Gordon. Months were spent wrangling over the size and scope of the relief expedition. Various alternatives were considered, including the possibility of sending an army from the south and from the Red Sea side. As in the case of Egypt, the strategists became concerned about the security of communications eastwards. Hartington at the War Office suggested that the ports of Sudan, particularly Suakin, be defended.[91] Ultimately, in September 1884, Wolseley was sent to take command. For four months his army fought its way against time up the uncharted Nile. The nation followed its progress carefully. Gordon became the icon of the age. On 5 February 1885, the news of the fall of Khartoum and the probability of the death of Gordon reached London. It aroused a sense of rage. Gladstone was universally blamed for this debacle, and was booed in public.[92] The Liberals were smeared with accusations of spinelessness and defeatism. There was such an uproar in Parliament and outside that Gladstone's government barely survived the outcry. Within two days Wolseley was instructed to destroy the power of the Mahdi at Khartoum. A railway inland from Suakin to Berber was commenced. However, Wolseley was in an extremely hazardous position, and meanwhile the situation in Central Asia had flared up. Wolseley was told that in view of military dangers in Central Asia, 'we are unwilling to take any step in the nature of further general declaration of policy'.[93] The government eventually decided to abandon Sudan to the Mahdi in spite of demands for revenge for Gordon.[94] At the same time, it was also made clear that Britain would not remain indifferent to interference by any European power in this region.

The settlement of Egyptian finances

Despite preoccupations with the Irish Crisis, parliamentary reforms and the debacle in Sudan, Gladstone's government devoted itself to the task of settling

Egyptian finances and the position of bondholders with tenacious consistency. Egypt's financial condition had continued to deteriorate because of the campaign in Sudan, the cost of British garrisons and the demand for compensation for the destruction of European life and property during the riots in Alexandria in 1882. By the end of 1883, there was a deficit of nearly £1 million in Egypt's budget. This financial crisis made Gladstone's government highly vulnerable to attack at Westminster as well as in the international arena.

Since the occupation of Egypt was declared to be a temporary arrangement, nothing was done to alter the control of Egypt's finances by the International Debt Commission. Britain had to depend on the goodwill of its members. The French looked upon the 'occupation' of Egypt by Britain as their worst humiliation since Sedan. It broke 'the liberal entente' and kept Britain and France at odds for two decades. As French opposition to continued British occupation was certain, it became very important for Britain to get the German vote. This could also ensure the votes of Austria and Italy. In the estrangement between Britain and France, Bismarck saw an opportunity to acquire colonies and to cultivate France. In the scramble for Africa, he threw his whole diplomatic weight on the French side, so much so that many English statesmen began to suspect that a definite understanding had come to exist between Germany and France. In this background, in June 1884 Britain convened a Conference of Powers at London to discuss British proposals for balancing the Egyptian budget. It was decided that Egypt's finances would be maintained by the International Caisse de la Dette, on which each of the Great Powers would have a vote. But, despite a preliminary agreement between Britain and France, German support for the French position caused great confusion and forced Granville to close the conference.

Bismarck wielded the *baton egyptien* with a vengeance. Britain recognised the German claim over Angra Pequena and agreed to the holding of an international conference on West Africa to be presided over by Bismarck. The West Africa Colonial Conference met in Berlin from November 1884 to February 1885. It defined the boundaries of the Congo Free State to be created by King Leopold of Belgium and discussed the question of free navigation on River Niger. Just a few days after this conference, Bismarck announced the creation of a German protectorate through a chartered company on the East African coast opposite Zanzibar. Britain accepted this. It was not as if Britain was not interested in this region. In fact, it lay as a *bloc* across the Cape to Cairo route on which many Britons had dreamed of building a railway. More important than this was the fact that Britain had always taken keen interest in the whole East African coast that lay on the long route to India. As early as the 1820s it had watched the French occupation of Madagascar with concern.[95] Later, Britain had claimed paramountcy over the entire coast from Suez to Mozambique through its client states, Egypt and Zanzibar. In the 1880s, when interest in this area, especially in Kilimanjaro, increased, members of Gladstone's Cabinet associated with colonial policy – Granville, Derby, Kimberley, Dilke and Chamberlain – began to advocate a policy which Gladstone thought savoured of annexationism.[96] Gladstone thereupon asked Sir John Kirk, the British Consul at

Zanzibar, to report on Kilimanjaro, 'the country with an unrememberable name'.[97] The latter reported that it should be brought under the British umbrella: 'Could we admit another occupation like that of Madagascar on our alternative route to India?',[98] he queried. Subsequently, to strengthen its own position in Egypt against France, Britain recognised German claims over Cameroon, Togoland, New Guinea and Fiji. A settlement was reached on the Egyptian question under which partial international control over Egyptian finances was re-established. Britain reiterated its intention to evacuate Egypt and guaranteed free navigation on the Suez Canal. The Sultan of Turkey, who threatened with losing Egypt altogether, decided to become a party to this agreement.

South Africa

In South Africa too, Gladstone compromised his ideals for the sake of strengthening Britain's hold over the Cape region. While in opposition, Gladstone had criticised the annexations of Transvaal and the Orange Free State and the involvement of Disraeli's government in the Zulu War. After Gladstone came to power, 'after trying various alternatives', British control was established over the land of the Zulus. Because of the stand taken by Gladstone in his election campaign, the Boers expected that Gladstone would give them back their independence. But Gladstone's government decided that continuation of the Confederation was important to the British and discovered arguments to show that the natives really wanted British rule. It decided to continue ruling the Boers. One consideration behind bringing the Afrikaners as well as Africans under British umbrella had been the desire to ensure Britain's control over the region that lay at the confluence of two oceans and commanded the most used route to the East generally, and especially to India. The Admiralty continued to base its strategy on the Cape route until the 1890s, though the shipping lobby gave Suez a higher priority.[99] The destruction of the power of the Zulus had the paradoxical result of emboldening the Boers. They became even more keen to make themselves independent. They rebelled in December 1880, and within three months they inflicted a humiliating defeat on the British army in the battle of Majuba Hill. Though embarrassed, Gladstone's government decided to negotiate. The Boer states did not yet have access to the sea; therefore, they did not yet seem to present a serious enough threat to the Cape route. In August 1881, the Convention of Pretoria was signed, granting the Boers independence under the suzerainty of the British Crown. What 'suzerainty' meant was never defined. The Boers of Transvaal were keen to secure an outlet to the sea so as to free themselves commercially from dependence on British ports. Therefore, in 1884 they broke the Convention by expanding across the agreed frontier into Bechuanaland. In mid-July 1884, the British Parliament decided to annex the entire south-west coast up to the Portuguese border. At this stage, the Germans made pre-emptive moves and annexed Angra Pequena, just north of the Cape colony. Gladstone's government was bitterly annoyed. It then acted decisively and annexed Bechuanaland. The aim was to restrict German expansion east-

wards and Transvaal's expansion westwards. It may be mentioned that Gladstone did not fight 'very hard' against these expansionist moves.[100]

The Penjdeh 'Incident'

On 30 March 1885, Russian and Afghan troops were engaged in a skirmish at Penjdeh, a little known place in Central Asia to the north-west of Afghanistan. The Afghan army suffered heavy losses and retreated. This Penjdeh 'incident' unleashed so much tension between Britain and Russia that most observers thought that war was unavoidable. It seemed that Russia had timed the step well. This was the time when the British government was facing embarrassments on the financial issues in Egypt and the British army was embroiled in Sudan. Britain immediately decided to put the Sudan question on hold.

The skirmish at Penjdeh was really not an isolated incident. It has to be seen in the background of events since 1880. As already discussed in the context of the Second Afghan War, Britain extended the Indian Empire westwards by annexing Baluchistan and 'occupying' Pishin and Sibi in 1881. By this time Russia's expansion towards the Mediterranean had been stalled. In 1881, the Three Emperors' Alliance was signed after which Russia considered itself protected on its western frontier and was in a position to resume the process of expansion in Central Asia.[101] During the half century preceding 1880, Russia had advanced some 2,000 kilometres from the Caspian towards Herat in Afghanistan. In the four years ending in June 1884, Russia advanced by about 1,000 kilometres along the same line.[102]

In view of Russia's expansion, Amir Abdur Rahman of Afghanistan began to press the government of India to make arrangements to define the frontier of his own state towards the north-west. This was an open frontier. But the British government was not in a position to accede to the Amir's wishes because the India Office had discovered that the Amir had considerable claims beyond the Oxus River which had been overlooked by Britain in the settlement with Russia on this issue in 1873. In January 1884, the Amir took matters in his own hands, crossed the Oxus and occupied Roshan. This precipitated a clash with the Governor of Bukhara. It was in this background that Russia announced the annexation of Merv on 13 February 1884.[103] From a strategic point of view, Merv was crucial because it brought the Russians almost to the Afghan frontier. It was some 300 kilometres from Herat, which was widely regarded as a gateway to India. The government of India advised the Amir to strengthen the Herat fortification. In view of the concern expressed by the British government, Britain and Russia appointed a commission in May 1884 to settle the frontier issue.[104] Afghanistan was not represented, but the Amir showed a consciousness of the advantage he could derive from such a settlement. He is reported to have said in his Darbar that once the settlement was reached between Britain and Russia, any Russian violation of the frontier would compel the British to come to his aid.

On the face of it, the reaction of the British government to the annexation of Merv was subdued. But, in reality, virtual panic gripped policy makers and

strategists. This was accentuated by the uneasiness felt at the naval situation following the disclosure by W.T. Stead, the editor of the *Pall Mall Gazette*, that the number of first-class battleships possessed by the French equalled that possessed by Britain. This created such intense clamour that Gladstone's government was forced to spend an extra £5.4 million on warships, ordnance and coaling stations in that year alone.[105] At the same time, strategists were forced to give serious thought to ways in which to meet the threat posed by Russia's expansion in the direction of Herat. In the Intelligence Branch of the War Office, Major J.S. Rothwell prepared a memorandum in July 1884 on 'England's means of offence against Russia'. He stressed that Britain had very ineffectual means of coercing Russia. Russia's sea-borne trade was not substantial, and hence a naval blockade would not inflict significant damage on Russia's economy. Only 36,000 men were available for offensive operations from Britain. They could not penetrate Russia's defences at the Baltic to strike at St Petersburg. Any decision to send an army through Afghanistan had the risk of loosening Britain's military grip on India at a dangerous moment. He held that Russia was still vulnerable from Batum. This port could be seized by a *coup de main* and then an expedition could be sent towards the Caspian Sea where it could get support from the people in the Caucasus. But, for the success of this strategy, it was essential that relations with Turkey be such so as to secure for the British fleet an immediate entry into the Black Sea.[106] This memorandum was printed for circulation to the Cabinet.

The other strategy of sending an army from India was also discussed when the government of India fixed a meeting with the Amir of Afghanistan. The government of India wanted to arrive at a decision before this meeting.[107] In March 1885, in a private telegram to Salisbury, Dufferin, the Viceroy, postulated two eventualities: one, 'Do we intend to declare war if Russians cross the Afghan frontier?', and two: 'Are we determined to keep Herat out of the hands of Russia at any price?' The Viceroy also made it clear that if a war started, the government of India did not have the armed strength to meet Russia in superior force. The strategists in India calculated that if a war started, by 7 July Russia would be able to place 100,000 men before Herat while the government of India could place only 55,000 (17,000 British and 38,000 Indian) men there. It was accepted that 30,000 British infantry and 2,000 cavalry would have to be retained in India to maintain the Raj.[108] The Viceroy's telegram was circulated to the members of the British Cabinet. Their comments show that the ministers were in a belligerent mood. After prolonged discussions, the British government decided to make Herat a *casus belli*.[109] On 25 March, the government of India was asked to inform the Amir that 'an attack on Herat will mean war between us and Russia everywhere, and the Amir will leave us to fight the battle in the way we think most likely to secure success'.[110] On the question of sending reinforcements, the government of India was told that 'we have determined to take, at once, authority to call out our reserves'. Explaining the reasons to the Queen, Gladstone pointed out that 'rapid enforcement of the British army in India stands related to the imperial duty of so high an order'.[111]

This was the background in which the clash between Russian and Afghan

forces took place at Penjdeh in March 1885. The expedition to Sudan suddenly paled into insignificance. War between Britain and Russia seemed imminent. The ministers displayed an unequivocal readiness to fight Russia. To many, it was a sharp pointer to the untrustworthiness of Russia's assurances.[112] Some Cabinet members showed a readiness to resign if any expedition to Sudan was sent against the background of trouble on the north-west frontier of India. Others were prepared to withdraw from Egypt altogether.

The man who had constantly preached a reduction of armaments to lessen the danger of war, Gladstone, asked Parliament to sanction eleven million pounds for spending on defence, and got it.[113] This was the largest grant for military purposes sanctioned by Parliament since 1815, leaving aside the years of the Crimean War. The British government showed readiness to lock horns with the Russians. In early April the Foreign Office despatched telegrams to major embassies warning them that a situation of 'utmost gravity had arisen'.[114] The Admiralty was asked to watch the movement of all Russian ships.[115] Granville in the Foreign Office and Northbrook at the Admiralty began to consider the possibility of a naval war in the Far East. Vice-Admiral Sir William Dowell, then Commander-in-Chief of the China station, was instructed 'to occupy Port Hamilton'.[116] The idea was to use the latter as a base of operations against Vladivostok, which was held by Russia. This was duly carried out, and on 26 April the governments of China, Japan and Korea were notified that such action had been taken. Even documents announcing a state of war between Britain and Russia were printed.[117] The government of India was given assurances of reinforcements from Britain. The Governor-General and the Commander-in-Chief began to work on several plans of campaign.[118] A special squadron of ironclads was assembled for possible service in the Baltic.[119]

In short, in the diplomatic correspondence of this time and in the exchanges between London and Calcutta during this period, one constant theme was that Britain was hovering on the brink of war.[120] Britain showed its readiness to fight despite full consciousness that it was difficult either to implement the Black Sea Strategy or to meet Russia in superior force on the north-west of India. Why? The explanation has to be sought in Britain's determination to maintain its hold over India, for which it was ready to pay any price. The point was not whether Russia could or wanted to conquer India. The point was that the Raj was based, above all, on the prestige of British arms, and for that reason Britain could not afford a defeat even on a remote frontier. As Salisbury told the Lords:

> Your frontier may be as strong as you please, your fortress may be as impregnable as you please; but if the prestige of the Power coming against you is greater than your own, it will penetrate through the barrier, it will undermine your sway, it will dissolve the loyalty and patriotism of those you rule.[121]

Besides, any sign that Britain lacked the means to defend its empire was likely to have an adverse effect on Britain's standing in Europe. As Rosebery, who had

just joined the Liberal Cabinet as Lord Privy Seal, wrote: 'All Europe is laughing at us. Our nose has been pulled all over Europe.'[122]

While taking these steps, the government in London continued to hope that Russia would not think that Herat was worth a general war. The Liberal government approached the Kaiser to ask him to become the arbitrator in the Afghan boundary settlement.[123] Meanwhile, Russia urged Bismarck to put pressure on the Ottomans to resist by force of arms any British attempt to enter the Black Sea. For Bismarck, the maintenance of the Dreikaisersbund had clear priority over any regard for British interests.[124] He had renewed this Bund at Kremsier in 1884. Ultimately, the Triple Alliance Powers delivered a united warning to the Turks against allowing the British navy to enter the Black Sea. This deprived Britain of the chance to adopt the only feasible plan of striking in the Caucasus through the Black Sea. Bismarck believed that this had contributed to the maintenance of peace.[125] Tension eased only when Russia accepted a proposal for arbitration. The Amir did not show any attachment to Penjdeh. This made it easier for each state involved to start negotiations once again on the question of determining the boundary between Afghanistan and Russia.

At this stage, on 12 June 1885, an exhausted and bitterly divided Liberal government in Britain resigned after defeat in a chance vote in the House of Commons. This was the time when the Irish issue was ablaze, the parliamentary reform programme was in progress and relations with the European powers were in a sorry state.

Historians have continued to portray Gladstone as a victim of circumstances.[126] But a scrutiny of his policies reveals that his approach was extremely coherent and consistent. He had come to power with the clear agenda of curtailing imperial responsibilities. But his government added more to the empire than any other ministry. In the garb of moral imperatives, he absorbed Egypt. When he invested 37 per cent of his savings in Egypt, he must have calculated that his countrymen would find ways of establishing control over Egypt, and this proved right. After occupying Egypt, his government tenaciously held on to it in spite of the fact that Britain had to face embarrassment in the Councils of Europe, in spite of increasing criticism internally and in spite of the consciousness that provision for additional administrators, soldiers and finance would have to be made. It is doubtful if it was the 'occupation' of Egypt by Britain that triggered off the partition of Africa. But there is no doubt that the resolve to stay on in Egypt did not slacken under any British government, Liberal or Conservative. The cause of entry ensured that there would be no quick return. Gladstone's government itself sent an expedition to Sudan. Subsequent governments, in order to establish control over the source of the Nile, became involved in the whole eastern half of Africa. In Egypt, whilst the Sultan of Turkey remained suzerain, real power lay in the hands of the British Agent and Consul-General, a post occupied by Evelyn Baring (created Baron Cromer in 1892) from 1883 to 1907. The metamorphosis of Baring and others at Cairo from liberalism to paternalism was the result of much more than a moral commitment. The route

to India had to be defended whatever the risks. It might also be mentioned that a good proportion of the military expenses were charged to India even though the government of India had not been consulted about the expedition.[127] Similarly, the whole course of the Penjdeh crisis showed the intensity of concern about the defence of the frontiers of the Indian Empire. On the continent, Gladstone had begun by arranging co-operation between the European powers. But by 1885, Britain was at odds with France over Egypt, with the Central Powers over co-operating with Russia, with Germany on the issue of passage through the straits, and with Russia over expansion towards the Indian frontier. There was some truth in Salisbury's jibe that 'the Liberal government had at least achieved their long desired "Concert of Europe". They have succeeded in uniting the continent of Europe – against England.'[128] We shall see in the next chapter that during 1885–92 under Salisbury, the Conservative government made efforts to ensure control over Egypt, and to strengthen Britain's position against Russia and France by arranging co-operation with the central powers.

4 Courting the Triple Alliance, 1885–92

In the 1880s, Britain continued to enjoy primacy in the imperial, naval and commercial fields. The task before British statesmen was to ensure that their country remained in unmolested enjoyment of this position. But they faced many challenges. In the economic field, faced with depression, European countries were adopting protectionist policies. This was bound to have adverse effects on Britain's economy. This period also saw a race amongst world powers for acquisition of colonies irrespective of their value. Within two decades, most of Africa and many parts of Asia were partitioned into territories under the formal rule or informal political domination of a handful of states.[1] Since Britain was a power with worldwide interests, it felt threatened everywhere. Across the Atlantic, relations with the United States were cool and threatened to become worse because of issues such as the Bering Sea seal fisheries and the Sackville-West Affair.[2] But the matter of greater concern was that Britain seemed friendless on the continent. At the time of the Penjdeh crisis, Germany and Austria-Hungary had stood by Russia and had together put pressure on the Ottoman government not to give permission to the British navy to enter the Black Sea. Thus Britain was deprived of a means to defend the Indian Empire should the occasion arise. Relations with France could not improve until the Egyptian wound had healed. Moreover, being a colonial power next to Britain, France could and did cause problems. At this time the British government became uneasy about French expansion in South-East Asia, which was seen as a threat to the security of the Indian Empire's eastern frontier. Nor did the prospect of war with Russia recede after the Penjdeh crisis. Throughout 1885 it was believed that Russian troops might march on Herat and that the presence of Russians at this key centre would seriously endanger the security of British India.

Added to the widespread challenge to its imperial position and diplomatic isolation was a consciousness of lack of military resources. During the Penjdeh crisis, Britain had promised to supply reinforcements to India. But an examination of the actual position showed that the situation was perilous. Sir Henry Brackenbury, Director of Military Intelligence, concluded in 1886 that because of lack of cavalry and departmental services, Britain could not place even two complete army corps in the field for foreign or home defence.[3] Even if available, it was believed that the armed forces could not ensure the security of the Indian

Empire should Russia choose to use the powerful position it had established in Central Asia. As General Roberts wrote, ‘the first disaster would raise throughout Hindustan a storm compared with which the troubles of 1857 would be insignificant’.[4] There was also widespread unease about Britain’s naval position. In 1884, when there were disagreements with France over conflicting imperial claims in Egypt and with Russia over expansion in Central Asia, it was found that the Royal Navy was not as superior in strength as the public had been led to believe.[5] Apprehensions were expressed that Britain’s obsolescent ships would not be able to protect Britain’s maritime commerce from the fast French raiders. Within the country, the political situation seemed uncertain. Two general elections had followed in quick succession during 1885 and 1886. The two-party system seemed to be crumbling. Even the government formed in 1886, which lasted six years, depended for its continuance on an uneasy coalition of the Conservatives and the Liberal Unionists.

The man who headed this government was Robert Gascoyne Cecil, the third Marquess of Salisbury. He remained Prime Minister from 1886 to 1892, except for a brief spell from February to July 1886 when Gladstone formed a government for the third time.[6] He was an experienced statesman. He had been India Secretary in 1867 and again during 1874–8. From 1878 to the fall of Disraeli’s government he had been Foreign Secretary. In 1883 he became leader of the Conservative Party. After he became Prime Minister, he retained the foreign affairs portfolio.[7] He was able to conduct the country’s foreign policy according to his own concepts and designs without much hindrance from his colleagues,[8] without serious criticism from the Opposition,[9] and without much reference to the advice of the Foreign Office.[10] But his government had to labour under many disadvantages. Writing to the Queen, he listed these as follows: ‘Without money, without any strong land force, with an insecure tenure of power, and with an ineffective agency, they have to counterwork the efforts of three Empires, who labour under none of these disadvantages’.[11] He concluded that the Cabinet was called upon to ‘make bricks without straw’.

In the country at large, this was the time when the influence of the landowning classes, to which Salisbury belonged, was waning.[12] The Franchise Act of December 1884 had extended the borough qualifications to the counties and had thus ‘suburbanised’ the electorate.[13] Disraeli had identified the Conservative Party with the people, the glories of empire and the spirit of patriotism. But Salisbury had no faith in the ordinary people or in Disraeli’s concept of ‘Tory Democracy’. Nevertheless, working-class conservatism not only persisted but also grew. The Primrose League was established in 1883 by the admirers of Disraeli with the goal of promoting the Tory principles, among others, of attachment to imperial ascendancy of Great Britain. Imperialist rhetoric accompanying the perception of threat to Britain’s global position by acquisition of colonies by other European powers and celebrations on the occasion of the Queen’s Jubilee in 1887 helped it grow. By 1891 the Primrose League had a membership of over one million.[14] Against this background, voices were raised in favour of more positive government action and ‘forward’ policies to protect the empire.

Salisbury had to take this imperial sentiment into account, though he believed that the problems facing Britain and lack of resources to protect what Britain had demanded a policy of restraint.

In foreign affairs, Salisbury devoted himself to strengthening Britain's diplomatic position by courting the Triple Alliance. The policy he followed has generally been described as that of leaning on the Triple Alliance without belonging to it.[15] To remain with the Triple Alliance he took many steps, sending friendly messages to Bismarck for an alliance, giving way on virtually all colonial questions, forming the Mediterranean Agreements and concluding the Heligoland–Zanzibar Treaty. Historians have situated these initiatives in the context of the Egyptian imbroglio and the Bulgarian crisis. On Egypt, Britain did need Bismarck's support on the Financial Commission. Since France and Russia were not likely to co-operate with Britain, Britain came to depend on the Triple Alliance powers, which in practice meant Germany. Similarly, Germany's co-operation was needed in the Balkans, where during 1885–6 relations between Russia and Bulgaria had deteriorated. Britain wanted to hem in Russia. While these issues were important, it is not sufficiently emphasised by historians that one weighty consideration that determined the choices before Britain's policy makers was the need to enlist Germany's co-operation in guarding the Raj so as to forestall the situation which had emerged during the Penjdeh crisis. This crisis had highlighted the fact that Britain simply did not have the means to adopt either the strategy of the Forward School of meeting Russia beyond the Northwest frontier of India in superior force or adopting the traditional reposte of sending its forces through the Black Sea. If the two enemies of Britain, France and Russia, combined, then Britain was likely to face what the Director of Military Intelligence described as 'the worst combination we have reason to dread', an alliance of France and Russia against Britain.[16]

Russia's expansion towards the Indian Empire had to be stalled by diplomacy, and this is what Salisbury sought to do by leaning on the Triple Alliance. This course served Britain's purposes in two ways. One, it gave Britain the option to adopt the Black Sea strategy. Second, by creating estrangement between Russia and the central powers, it was likely to oblige Russia to keep part of its army on the Polish frontier. This could dissuade Russia from sending its army towards Britain's Indian Empire.[17] Thus, amiable relations with the central powers could provide relief to Britain at a time when, according to the Intelligence Branch of the War Office, Russia was hourly strengthening its position in the Black Sea, in Transcaspia, in Persia and in Central Asia, while Britain had failed to do so in Persia and Asia Minor.[18] Germany too had embarked upon an active colonial policy in 1884–5 and had acquired a colonial empire five times the size of its European homeland. But Bismarck showed no sign of thinking that colonies would benefit Germany. The British perhaps felt that Germany's desire for colonies was natural. Hence, they continued to believe that under the stewardship of Bismarck, Germany was a satiated power with only limited colonial ambitions and that its interests lay in not disturbing the balance of power on the continent.

When Salisbury assumed office in June 1885, Britain and Russia were engaged in negotiations to determine the boundary between the Russian Empire and Afghanistan. By the end of the month, these negotiations had reached a deadlock because Russia tried to part with only a portion of the Zulfiqar Pass while earlier the Afghan government had been given to understand that it would get the whole of the Zulfiqar Pass. Like the Liberals earlier, the Conservatives found the situation so threatening that Russia was given a warning to the effect that any advance on Herat would mean war.[19] Ultimately, by September, Russia yielded on this issue. The Anglo-Russian agreement could only be signed two years later, in 1887, and during these two years there were many minor flurries of alarm.[20]

Offer of alliance offer to Germany

During his short-lived first administration, Salisbury explored the feasibility of arriving at an understanding with Germany. In August 1885 he sent Sir Philip Currie, the Assistant Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office, to Berlin with a 'paper' that Currie showed to Bismarck's son, Herbert Bismarck. It suggested 'a close union between the greatest military power and the greatest naval power'. Hope was expressed that such a union would ensure for Germany the safety of its continental possessions in the event of European complications and to Britain it would give freedom to defend its interests in the event of unprovoked aggression on the part of Russia against the Indian Empire. In this paper, the determination to defend India even at the cost of unleashing a general war was expressed unequivocally:

> The point on which we should concentrate the greatest part of our energies would be the cutting of the communications between Russia and her Central Asian possessions. For this it would be an absolute necessity for us to obtain an entrance to the Black Sea for our ships, and this we should unquestionably do by some means or other, whatever view Europe might hold as to the localisation of the war.[21]

On receipt of this proposal, Bismarck did not react immediately, but instead adopted 'a sphinx-like pose'. Apart from distrust of British parliamentary institutions and differences over ideology, Bismarck felt that Germany would not gain anything by supporting Britain against Russia over Afghanistan. He was aware that though renewed in 1884, the Dreikaisersbund did not eliminate Austro-Russian rivalry in the Balkans. He did not want to alienate Russia at a time when the German General Staff was growing increasingly alarmed about Russian troop concentration along the Polish border and about Germany's prospects in a two-front war.[22] In fact, the antagonism between the bear and the whale suited Bismarck for, by keeping Russia's energies diverted to the East, it eased pressure on Germany's eastern frontier. He did not gain anything by relieving Britain of anxieties on the Indian border. As he told the Kaiser: 'If the Russian army has

nothing to do in Asia, it will make itself busy on its western borders'.[23] Some right-wing newspapers in Germany openly encouraged Russia to take what it wanted in Asia. In fact, in 1885 many diplomats, amongst them Bernhard Bülow, at that time attached to the St Petersburg embassy, and Holstein, a very influential official at the Foreign Office, were disappointed that war between Britain and Russia had been avoided. Bismarck replied only after three months, but courteously and at length. He clarified that he was 'unwilling to side for or against England or Russia on points where their interests were opposed'.[24] This overture to Germany thus came to nothing. But it was significant in that, in order to guard the Raj, the British government had shown readiness to take a distinct step forward into Europe. It could not afford to antagonise Germany. Despite the failure of this effort, Salisbury continued to send friendly messages. He supported Germany in Zanzibar and the Caroline Islands. During the first six months of his second administration also, Salisbury virtually gave way to Germany on all colonial questions.

The conquest of Upper Burma

Meanwhile, a crisis had been brewing near the eastern frontier of the Indian Empire, in Burma. The British government took interest in this region throughout the nineteenth century. Two wars were fought with the Burmese king during 1824–6 and again in 1852, after which the British government annexed the entire coastal region of Burma comprising Arakan, Pegu and Tennaserim. On 1 January 1886, the Conservative government annexed Upper Burma as well.[25] This time it was the expansion of empire by the French in the vicinity of Burma which prompted the action. Unlike Afghanistan, Burma never became a nerve centre of international relations, in part because this region was accessible to the British navy. But this expedition to Burma merits a brief consideration because it highlights the extreme concern about the security of the Raj and shows that Britain wanted other European powers not just to keep their hands off the frontiers of India but also off neighbouring states as well.

In the 1860s, spurred by the French Third Empire's ethos of expansion of trade and empire and *la gloire*, the French embarked on a policy of expansion in Cochin China. After 1870, the French continued to expand in South-East Asia. Until then, the British government had seen no reason to be apprehensive. Britain's trade in Siam as well as its military and maritime strength in South-East Asia were overwhelmingly superior to the puny resources of the French naval station at Saigon. Moreover, the natural route of expansion from Cochin China was thought to lie northward, in the direction of Tonkin and South China,[26] and therefore it was believed that France was not likely to expand towards Siam and Burma. The situation changed in the early 1880s. In 1881, the French seized Hanoi and invaded Tonkin. In 1884, Cambodia was incorporated into the French Empire. By this time the French were manifestly irritated over the 'occupation' of Egypt by Britain, and Bismarck was known to be stoking their colonial ambitions. Both Britain and France began to suspect each other of wishing to

extend their own influence over Siam, which lay between their respective empires. Several reports of economic and military activities of the French in the vicinity of British Burma and the Straits Settlements began to reach Calcutta and London. These set British policy makers wondering about the final limits of French ambitions in this region.

This was at the time when Russia had announced the annexation of Merv. Even the Liberal government began to take a gloomy view of the situation. Kimberley wrote to Ripon: 'The temper of the French is such that there is no amount of aggressiveness in the east we may not expect'.[27] Britain did not seem to have the necessary military and financial resources to fight Russia. The prospect of facing Russia and France simultaneously was unnerving indeed. 'If we are to burn the candles at both ends, in the north-west in fear of Russia and in the south-east in fear of France, we shall reduce India to bankruptcy', commented Ripon.[28] Meanwhile, the government of Burma under King Thibaw (1878–85) made efforts to establish contacts with European countries. In April 1883 it informed the government of India that some officers were being sent to Europe to gather information on industrial arts and sciences.[29] The Foreign Office suspected from the first that this mission had a political purpose.[30] It promptly asked the Quai d'Orsay not to forget 'the very peculiar situation of that country in relation to British India'.[31] Lord Lyons, the British ambassador at Paris, met Jules Ferry many times between June 1884 and January 1885 in this connection.

The French were not averse to this opportunity of establishing political and commercial relations with Burma. Because of geographical proximity, the French government was taking more interest in Siam than in the more remote and land-locked kingdom of Upper Burma, but its negotiations with Siam for political and commercial co-operation were proving abortive. Moreover, France suspected that the British wanted to annex Chiangmai in Siam to the west of Lower Burma, which was already a part of the British Empire. This could imperil France's new frontiers in western Tonkin. In this situation, some influence in Burma could create a sort of regional counterpoise. It is difficult to deny that Jules Ferry sought, through commercial negotiations with the Burmese, a position of advantage over the Upper Irrawady which would enable France to restrain any thrust through Siam.[32]

At Paris, meanwhile, the France-Burmese Commercial Treaty was concluded on 15 January 1885. Thereafter a French consul was appointed at Mandalay, and rumours of railway and mining concessions to the French circulated.[33] Outside Burma, a treaty was signed between France and China at Tientsin in June 1885, under which the Chinese government ratified French rule over Annam and much of Cambodia. During 1884–5 the governments in Britain and India were flooded by petitions from chambers of commerce in Rangoon, Calcutta, London and Liverpool demanding free trade in Burma and the end of Thibaw's rule.[34] These views were echoed in the press.

By this time the Penjdeh incident had made the British government take steps preliminary to war. It was obvious that if Britain became involved in a war

against Russia, France could drag Britain into another war in the east. The Chief Commissioner of Upper Burma, for example, wrote: 'If we are not at war with Russia, France won't go to war with us about Upper Burma, while, if we are at war with Russia, France is likely enough to be at our throats on the Egyptian and other grounds'.[35] When the Conservatives came to power in June 1885, the young and ambitious Randolph Churchill became India Secretary. He was convinced that the British should have paramount influence in Burma.[36] He also believed that a forward policy in Burma would make the government popular and win votes for the party in the forthcoming elections. In the elections held in November, the question of immediate action in Burma did become an electoral issue.

On 22 October 1885, an ultimatum was sent to the Burmese government giving one week's notice. After its expiry, an expedition was despatched. The king surrendered after feeble resistance. The news of victory reached London after the elections were over and could not influence the voters. The electoral reverse and the prospect of the return of the Liberals did not make Salisbury and Churchill consider any change in policy. The only hitch in annexing Burma was the likelihood of it becoming a financial liability, because it was believed that the economic resources of Upper Burma might not be able to sustain British administration. Ultimately it was decided that financial control and responsibility of administration be assigned to the government of India. On 1 January 1886, Upper Burma was proclaimed a part of the British Empire. The Indian taxpayer was made to pay for Upper Burma's deficit.[37] The Burmese carried on a sustained struggle against British control well into the twentieth century.[38]

Randolph Churchill underlined the importance of the threat from the French in taking the decision to annex Burma: 'It is the French intrigue that has forced us to go to Burma, but for that element we might have treated Thibaw with severe neglect', he wrote.[39] Historians, on the other hand, have tended to highlight the economic and financial aspects.[40] Both these views contain some truth. Much before the French started taking interest in this region, the British had fought two wars there. Thus they were not likely to remain indifferent to developments in this region. As far as interest in trade and investments is concerned, this annexation can be seen as a consequence of the forces that led to the partition of Africa during the same period. But it also shows that the British government was extremely sensitive even to the semblance of hostile activity on the part of any European power in the vicinity of India.

Guarding interests in the Near East

In 1885, the Conservative government faced a fresh crisis in the Near East also. On 18 September 1885, the people of Eastern Roumelia rebelled against the Sultan of Turkey, and the next day Prince Alexander, the ruler of Bulgaria, proclaimed its union with his own state. This new state of Bulgaria and Eastern Roumelia was bigger than other states in the Balkans, and this created a commotion in the region. The Serbs, the Greeks and other peoples in the Balkans were

sure to seek compensation. The Great Powers were faced with a *fait accompli*. These developments could escalate into a major crisis because the issue involved their interests.

The European powers would have liked the Ottomans to handle the situation themselves. But, as in 1875, the Ottoman ruler was content to appeal to the European powers for help. In 1878, Russia had created 'Big Bulgaria' at San Stefano and had been deeply resentful of the reversal of this decision at the Berlin Congress. But subsequently, its efforts to create a subservient state of the Bulgars had failed. Prince Alexander of Battenburg himself had emerged as the most formidable opponent of Russia's Balkan strategy. Russia was furious at this ingratitude. This new check on the pan-Slavic ambitions of Russia suited Vienna, but any attempt at intervention by Austria was likely to escalate into an Austro-Russian war, and Bismarck was very clear that Germany was not likely to gain anything for its sacrifices even if Austria was victorious. If anything, such a conflict was likely to rekindle the Polish question. In this situation, Bismarck decided to stand by the Dreikaisersbund and support Russia in Bulgaria on the grounds that Bulgaria was in the eastern half where predominance of Russia was recognised under the Dreikaisersbund, but he was disinclined to let Russia increase its influence. So the Dreikaisersbund was destined to fail.

Most observers expected Salisbury to oppose this resurrection of Big Bulgaria. He had taken the lead in opposing it at the Berlin Congress in 1878. Salisbury's first reaction was to uphold the Berlin settlement and join the 'Three Northern Courts' in opposing this union and supporting the Ottomans. He had made overtures for an understanding to Germany, and such a stance could produce positive results in that direction. Salisbury even proposed a naval demonstration to give moral support to the Sultan. He reacted favourably to Bismarck's proposal for a conference of ambassadors at Constantinople to find a formula to solve the crisis. On 22 September 1878, he instructed Sir William White, the ambassador at Constantinople, to join the Powers in upholding the Treaty of Berlin.[41] But, within a few days, he reversed his position, decided to abandon Turkey and support the union of Bulgaria, ostensibly on the grounds that the British government's policy was 'to cherish and foster self-sustaining nationalities'.[42] He also proposed a personal union of two Bulgarias under Prince Alexander, with each part retaining its institutions. The question arises: why this *volte face*? Broadly, three factors explain this change. One, Salisbury realised that the Ottoman Empire was too weak to stem Russia's expansion. In his letter to White, he expressed his disgust at the Ottomans who had 'no spark of vitality left' and who 'stretched no hand to save their province'.[43] They had also failed to fulfil the obligation they had undertaken in 1878 to garrison the Eastern Roumelian frontier so as to prevent Russia from advancing towards Constantinople in any future war. Second, since 1882, the Turks had been indignant over the occupation of Egypt by Britain. In 1885 they had refused to give permission to the British fleet to enter the straits. Finally, it was felt that a self-respecting enlarged Bulgaria would form a more effective barrier to Russia's advance towards Constantinople and the Mediterranean. In this situation, the

British government decided not to go too far either in support of the Ottomans or the Bulgars. Giving expression to Britain's position, Salisbury told the German ambassador, 'we are fish'.[44]

By the time the conference met in early November, none of the Powers were ready to work for its success. The conference was nevertheless held 'to drown the question in ink'.[45] As soon as it became clear that the Conference would not be able to evolve some acceptable settlement, Serbia declared war on Bulgaria. But Serbia's performance did not match its ambitions. Only Austria's intervention saved it from total defeat. Greece also mobilised and was restrained by the European powers, who resorted to a naval blockade. Britain participated in this. There were reasons for believing that the situation would escalate. It was Bismarck who, making use of the alliance of 1879, restrained Austria from proceeding further. Gladstone's return to power in February 1886 added a further complication. The governments of Russia and Greece began to think that British policy might be reversed. Rosebery, now Foreign Secretary, hastened to convince everyone concerned that nothing new would be attempted.

By the time Salisbury became the Prime Minister again in July 1886, it seemed certain that Russia would intervene. A month later Russian agents forced Prince Alexander to abdicate. This provoked loud protests in London and Vienna. Russia's action was taken as a curtain-raiser of a plan to invade Bulgaria. The British government began to see the possibility of Russia at Constantinople. This would be 'the ruin of our party and a heavy blow to our country', wrote Salisbury.[46] London also remained worried that Russia might open a front in Central Asia. From Britain's point of view, even France was becoming a centre of uncertainty. The latter half of 1886 saw the rekindling of the revanchist passion in France as a result of the 'rise' of General Boulanger, 'the dashing figure on horseback'. In May 1886 he became War Minister. The resultant patriotic fervour was directed primarily against Germany, but Britain was also targeted. Relations between Britain and France were far from friendly not only because of the Egyptian sore but also because of bickering in the New Hebrides, Morocco, Newfoundland and South-East Asia. French chauvinists wanted to secure Russia's help in a war against Germany. In Russia too, the Panslavs relished such a prospect. This contributed to the apprehension that in the eventuality of a war against Russia, France might not remain neutral.

In this situation, when Russia was active in the Balkans and the British government was doubtful of its ability to face Russia's superior force in the Balkans or in Central Asia, Britain's policy makers suggested two alternatives. Randolph Churchill at London and Sir Robert Morier at the embassy at St Petersburg advocated an Anglo-Russian *entente*. Churchill held that Britain should work for an understanding with Russia ensuring security of the Indian frontier in return for giving recognition to Russia's ambitions in the Balkans.[47] The Pan-Slavs in Russia, who wanted to fight first Austria and then Germany, entertained the idea of improving relations with Britain. The fact that Britain and Russia were engaged in intensive negotiations on the Afghan issue provided opportunities for an exchange of views. During the Afghan negotiations, Giers, Russia's

Foreign Minister, did express the hope that the discussion on Afghanistan would be a stepping stone to better understanding all round.[48] This suggestion failed to tempt Salisbury. It was not easy to give up the long-standing commitment to maintain the Ottoman Empire. Besides, authorities at London were united in their distrust of Russia's plans and promises. In 1882 the India Office had drawn up an exhaustive review covering nearly 150 printed pages contrasting Russia's assurances and actions during the preceding two decades and concluded that past experience did not justify any trust in Russia's pledges.[49] Dufferin, the Viceroy of India, and Kimberley, the India Secretary, endorsed this view. Even Salisbury shared this general distrust of Russia and was sceptical of resting the defence of India upon the guarantees of Russia.[50]

Others advocated a policy of accommodation with the Triple Alliance. This was likely to make the strategy of a naval thrust through the Black Sea feasible. In addition, by entangling Russia on its European frontier, it was likely to provide relief to Britain on the Indian frontier. Brackenbury, the Director of Military Intelligence, wrote later: 'They think of Russia as if she had no European frontier, no Triple Alliance to consider, no Eastern Question in Europe and, as if, her one aim and object was the conquest of India'.[51]

The rumours of rapprochement between Britain and Russia, as also the possibility of understanding between Russia and France, made Bismarck uneasy. The time had also come for the renewal of the Triple Alliance. But none of the powers of the Triple Alliance viewed this with satisfaction. Each felt that it derived little benefit from the alliance's continuation. But given the international scenario, Bismarck wanted it to continue. It was in this background that Salisbury put forward the suggestion for agreement with Italy. Bismarck deftly fostered this. An agreement between Britain and Italy would increase the latter's worth in Austria's eyes and enable Bismarck to renew the Triple Alliance. Italy, given its long coastline, stood to gain by joining a great naval power.

What were Salisbury's reasons in suggesting an agreement with Italy? If one is to go by a note on his motives penned at leisure before leaving office in 1892, advising his successor to be 'as friendly to Italy as we reasonably can', he defined Britain's interest in such an understanding as follows:

> Italy, hard pressed by her financial necessities, might abandon the Triple Alliance and go over to France. In that case Austria and Germany would also feel themselves unequal to maintain a possible attack from Russia and from France. As Bismarck has repeatedly indicated, Germany would in that case offer herself to Russia, and it is well known that the alliance of Russia can be had at the price of acquiescing in her designs upon Constantinople.[52]

It was thus the desire to ward off the eventuality of an alliance between Germany and Russia that weighed heavily with Salisbury in making the agreement with Italy and, subsequently, in standing by it.

Ultimately, on 12 February 1887, Britain and Italy exchanged notes

expressing a common desire to maintain the status quo in the Mediterranean and to co-operate to that end.[53] Another exchange took place between Salisbury and Kalnoky, the Austro-Hungarian Foreign Minister, on 24 March 1887 with reference to the Aegean and Black Seas, though the Balkans was not specifically mentioned. Even Spain was brought into the picture through an agreement with Italy on 4 May 1887. On 20 February 1887, the Triple Alliance was renewed largely on Italy's terms. From Germany, Italy secured the promise of support in its colonial ambitions, and from Austria the recognition of a position of equality in the Balkans. It is accepted that Italy's connection with Britain contributed to this renewal of the Triple Alliance.

In February 1887 the British government also opened negotiations with the Ottoman government with a view to defining Britain's position in Egypt, where promises to evacuate were proving extremely embarrassing. Sir Henry Drummond-Wolff was sent to Constantinople for this purpose. He had carried on negotiations with the Ottoman government in 1885 at the time of the Penjdeh crisis. Historians tend to discuss this mission primarily in the Egyptian context,[54] but the Indian dimension was extremely important as well. Drummond-Wolff was asked to offer the evacuation of Egypt after three years to the Sultan in return primarily for three things: one, legal title to the political surveillance of the Canal; two, the right of re-entry in case signs of internal or external danger to the Canal re-emerged; and three, access through the straits to the Black Sea for British warships. The first of these conditions stemmed from a desire to have a say in matters relating to the Canal. The right of re-entry was asked for to retain control over the Suez railway and also over the telegraph line between Britain and India, the only overland portion of which passed through Egypt. In case of political uncertainty, Britain did not want to take any risk.[55] The third condition was intended to give Britain the means for adopting the Black Sea strategy to create a diversion in case Russia threatened India's frontier.

After patient negotiations, Drummond-Wolff managed to work out a draft acceptable to the Porte. But Russia and France acted hand in glove, and managed to stall this effort. The ambassadors of these two countries asked the Porte to conclude agreements with them embodying similar concessions to the French in Syria and the Russians in Armenia.[56] Britain wanted to keep all European powers out of these Asiatic provinces of the Ottomans, and even after the cutting of the Suez Canal, Britain wanted to have the option of an alternative overland route. It also wanted to obstruct Russia's expansion towards the Persian Gulf. For these reasons, rather than giving rights to Russia and France in these provinces, the British government opted to drop the negotiations altogether. It is no accident that at this juncture the project of a railway from the Mediterranean Sea to Bombay via Baghdad was revived.[57] Commenting on the reaction of the European powers to the Drummond-Wolff Convention, Robinson and Gallagher say that the issue had 'grown into a battle of prestige' between the two groups of powers and became an index of their relative influence over the Ottoman Empire.[58] For Britain, at least, it was not a mere question of prestige or relative influence over Constantinople. It was a question of having

or not having the means to thwart Russia's expansion towards the northwest frontier of its empire. Britain's ability to maintain its Great Power status was at stake.

This co-operation between France and Russia in sabotaging the settlement with the Porte underlined the need to have some means of strengthening Britain's position in the Near East and Asia Minor. Germany, Austria and Italy had stood by Britain firmly and steadfastly at the time of these negotiations. At Sophia, in the meantime, Prince Ferdinand of Coburg was elected to succeed Prince Alexander to the throne of Bulgaria, but Russia doggedly opposed his election. By August there seemed to be a real danger that in order to force Bulgaria to have a ruler amenable to itself, Russia would send an expedition to Varna. In fact, rumours remained current during the second half of 1887 that Russia was planning military action against Bulgaria or Turkey.[59] As already mentioned, the Dreikaisersbund had broken down. But Bismarck did not want to drop the Russian parcel. Hence, in June 1887, he signed a separate, secret treaty with Russia, the Reinsurance Treaty. While he was keen to prevent any confrontation between Austria and Russia, he was not ready to bear the brunt of Russia's resentment. So he encouraged Austria and Italy to court Britain with a view to maintaining the integrity of the Ottoman Empire. The British Cabinet had reservations about entering into an agreement against Russia to which Germany was not a party. Ultimately, Britain gave in when the central powers agreed to cover the straits and Asia Minor as well. On 12 December 1887, an agreement was signed between Britain, Italy and Austria-Hungary under which the three powers agreed to co-operate to maintain peace and the status quo in the Near East, the freedom of the straits, Turkish authority in Asia Minor and its suzerainty in Bulgaria. Thus, Britain's interests in the Ottoman Empire were covered. They also agreed that if the need arose, the three powers would 'immediately come to an agreement as to the measures to be taken'.[60] This was called the second Mediterranean Agreement, though it had little to do with the Mediterranean. Germany was not a party, but the association of Germany was underlined by the fact that it was the German ambassador at Constantinople who was asked to inform the Sultan that a close accord existed between Britain, Austria and Italy for the purpose of maintaining the status quo in the Balkans and the integrity of Turkey.[61]

How far did the Mediterranean Agreements involve a commitment on the part of Britain to join Austria and Italy in the eventuality of war? Technically, there was no obligation to go to war. Salisbury insisted on an exchange of notes rather than the signing of a convention. He maintained that Britain's parliamentary institutions did not permit the government to undertake pledges and engagements to go to war in a hypothetical contingency.[62] Nevertheless, the British government had undertaken the commitment to co-operate with Austria and Italy in case the status quo in the Balkans, the straits and Asia Minor was disturbed. This was an obligation with far-reaching implications. Simply because the war did not come, the obligation did not become innocuous. Salisbury knew that he had virtually made Britain an associate member of the Triple Alliance.

After the first Mediterranean Agreement, he had written to the Queen that it was 'as close an alliance as the parliamentary character of our institutions will permit'.[63] From a debate in parliament on foreign affairs, even the European powers had come to know that at least an exchange of views had taken place concerning the Mediterranean directed either against France or against Russia.[64]

In the letter to the Queen, Salisbury had also written: 'Your Majesty's advisors recommend it on the whole as necessary in order to avoid serious danger'. What serious danger did Salisbury want to ward off? Salisbury showed keenness to sign this agreement despite fears of being lured into rescuing Bismarck's 'somewhat endangered chestnuts'. He realised that Bismarck was pushing other powers to bear the brunt of Russia's resentment without making Germany a party to the agreement. Salisbury also felt that Britain together with Italy, Austria and Turkey might become embroiled in a war against Russia, thus giving Germany an opportunity to humiliate France further.[65] Why did Salisbury take such a risk? The situation in Europe was not really alarming. Britain had signed a series of minor agreements with France during the autumn of 1887, including one on the Suez Canal.[66] Tension with Russia had eased after the Afghan Boundary Commission completed its labours in July 1887. The key to intense anxiety on his part seems to lie in his concerns about the Indian Empire. After the First Mediterranean Agreement Salisbury had written to the Queen:

> If, in the present grouping of nations, which Prince Bismarck tells us is now taking place, England was left out in isolation, it might well happen that the adversaries, who are coming against each other on the Continent, might treat the English Empire as divisible booty, by which their differences might be adjusted; and, though England could defend herself, it would be at fearful risk and cost.[67]

The manner in which France and Russia co-operated at Constantinople to deny Britain a settlement over Egypt strengthened the need to ensure the co-operation of the central powers. Besides, during 1886–7 France seemed to be increasingly using the Suez route for commercial and strategic purposes. In 1886, France sent troops to Cochin and Annam through the Suez Canal. In the same year, the route to Madagascar through the Canal was converted into a steam route.[68] All such developments were watched with concern. Randolph Churchill echoed the general sentiment when he wrote: 'We shall never give up India and we shall stay in Egypt for a long time to come'.[69]

Ensuring naval predominance

In 1889, the British government took the decision to expand the navy on a scale never before seen in peacetime. The occasion was provided by reports in the press in January 1888 of extraordinary preparations by the French navy at

Toulon. This issue was discussed in the British press for months, and there was much discussion in the Cabinet as well. In France, by this time, Boulanger had been dismissed from the army and was using all his energy to ignite revanchist passion. This served to heighten the atmosphere of tension. By May–June, Britain was in the grip of an invasion scare. The chances of 'a bolt from the blue' were seriously discussed. On 14 May 1888, Garnet Wolseley, the hero of Tel-el-Kebir and Adjutant-General at that time, addressed the House of Lords on the question of military preparedness. The attendance was so high that Salisbury noted it was the largest gathering he could recall.[70] Pleading for an increase in the size of the armed forces, Wolseley said that aside from garrisons for India and the colonies, three regular army corps and six cavalry brigades were needed for home defence alone, and a further two army corps for any planned embarkation. The 'Blue Water' School, on the other hand, argued that the way to protect Britain and the empire lay in the command of the sea.

This invasion scare made a review of Britain's naval resources imminent. The British navy was superior to any individual fleet. It is interesting that the Admiralty had not exerted pressure to expand the navy. It did not perceive any threat to Britain's security. In February 1888, replying to Salisbury's request for reinforcement of the Mediterranean fleet, George Hamilton, the First Lord of the Admiralty, reported that the French navy was not big enough to cause concern for the security of the United Kingdom. 'If the French mean business it is not to the Mediterranean but to China and Australasia that reinforcements should go, as our commerce can be hit', he opined.[71] One month later, explaining to the House of Commons the reasons why the Admiralty did not lay down a large number of ships at the same time, he said that so rapid was the change in design and in the development of speed that the ships would probably be obsolete or useless in ten or fifteen years.[72] The government did not perceive any threat to its naval position from any other country. As to France, Salisbury held that as long as France's relations with Germany remained strained, it could not pose any danger to Britain. Italy had only ten small first-class ships, and reports about the efficiency and personnel of even these were not very encouraging.[73] The Russian fleet in the Black Sea was so small that it was believed that the Turkish fleet would' most certainly deal with it alone with the greater ease'.[74]

This was the background against which, in the summer of 1888, Salisbury asked the Admiralty and the War Office to report on the possibility and consequences of the French seizing London by a *coup de main*. The Admiralty discounted any chance of a French invasion on the British Isles, but agreed that the operation was mechanically possible.[75] This was sufficient for Salisbury. He decided to take 'full precautions' against even 'a distant possibility' on the ground that 'our stake is so great'.[76] A special Select Committee was formed to consider the question of military preparedness. In the spring of 1889, Lord Hamilton said in Parliament that Britain's establishment should be on such a scale that it should be equal to the naval strength of any two countries.[77] In

1889, the Naval Defence Act was passed under which the two-power standard was adopted; that is, Britain committed itself to maintaining a force of battleships equal in number to the combined strength of the next two powers. It decided to spend an additional sum of £20 million over the next four years on building new ships. This standard was confirmed time and again by responsible statesmen of both parties over the next twelve years.[78]

The question arises: when the Admiralty was not interested in expansion, when the British government did not perceive any threat from any power, why is it that the government adopted this ambitious programme of expansion? Why did Salisbury think that Britain's stake was so great that full precautions must be taken against even a distant possibility? One reason was that Britain's policy makers had a lurking feeling that the military means at their disposal to meet the obligations they had undertaken under the Mediterranean Agreements were not adequate. Bismarck had been throwing hints that if Britain expected assistance from the Triple Alliance in defending its Mediterranean interests, its naval presence in the Mediterranean should be strong enough to enable it to reciprocate. At Berlin, Britain's decision to adopt the two-power standard was welcomed as a pro-German gesture. But from this it would not be proper to conclude, as C.J. Lowe does, that passing this Act was 'to provide a force, by the early nineties, to contain both France and Russia in the Mediterranean, thus enabling Britain to maintain her links with the Triple Alliance'.[79] It is relevant to point out that establishing links with the Triple Alliance by itself was not the purpose of Britain's foreign policy decisions at this time. The purpose was to strengthen Britain's global position by ensuring the support of the Triple Alliance powers against Russia.

The real issue that was causing disquiet was the growing sign of Franco-Russian collaboration. Since the rise of Boulanger, French chauvinists and the Pan-Slavs in Russia had each been urging their respective governments to conclude an alliance.[80] At the beginning of 1888, there were renewed rumours that France and Russia might enter a formal alliance and that, in particular, their fleets might co-operate in an effort to drive British forces out of the Mediterranean.[81] In October 1888, Russia floated its first loan in the Paris market. Russia had also commissioned three powerful battleships for its Black Sea fleet, which were likely to be ready by 1890. Thus, at a time when, despite the Mediterranean Agreements, the British government continued to feel insecure and continued to be suspicious of Bismarck's motives, expansion of the navy was a sure way of enabling Britain to face the Franco-Russian combination in the Mediterranean without relying on the central powers.

Bismarck's alliance offer

In January 1889, Bismarck made an offer of an alliance with Britain, which was formally conveyed through Hatzfeldt, the German ambassador at London. He suggested an arrangement directed against France and offered Britain a free hand in East Africa. Bismarck's real aims have continued to puzzle historians.[82]

Salisbury's reaction to this alliance offer was circumspect, though he recognised the importance of the news. About Salisbury's reasons, historians have tended to concentrate on considerations of domestic politics. The Conservative Party depended on the goodwill of the Liberal Unionists for survival and they were opposed to any entanglements in Europe. Besides, there was acute dissension over the Irish issue. In this situation such an alliance would have produced a domestic political row of the first order. But it seems that the same considerations that made the British government strengthen the navy made Salisbury decline this offer. Though the Naval Defence proposal was announced in March 1889, the decision had been taken by January.

Bismarck had proposed an alliance directed against France. This served to confirm Salisbury's long-standing feeling that Germany was out to crush that country. Paul Kennedy says that in Salisbury's correspondence of this period, such an apprehension is expressed again and again.[83] Salisbury did not want to encourage the process which could make Germany assertive and could result in Germanic domination of west-central Europe. This was also the period when Francesco Crispi, given to dreams of grandeur, had adopted a belligerent attitude towards France. Bismarck was trying to ensure Britain's support for Italy. This in fact reinforced the British government's desire not to formalise its relationship with the Central Powers. Bismarck also referred to the threat posed by Washington,[84] but Britain did not want to antagonise the USA. At the same time, Bismarck made no mention of Russia, and it was against Russia that the British had always desired Germany's support. Wihelmstrasse was aware of this. Brooding over Britain's reaction, Holstein at the German Foreign Office wondered whether, in order to ensure British support, Germany would have to offer to guarantee India.[85] In fact, the existing diplomatic alignment served Britain's interests well. In case of Russia's descent on Constantinople, Austria would oppose Russia and, under the Triple Alliance, Germany and Italy would opt for a policy of restraint. By April 1889, the Boulangist movement in France had also collapsed. Besides, Britain had no wish to be dragged into a war against France on behalf of Crispi's ambitions. Britain had already taken the decision to strengthen the Royal Navy, and one aim was to avoid committing Britain further to the Triple Alliance and to guard itself in case France and Russia joined together. In this situation, Salisbury could afford to leave the alliance offer 'on the table, without saying yes or no'.[86]

Since Britain's refusal was not a public one, the tacit agreement between Britain and Germany to lean towards each other without formalising their relationships continued. They remained on friendly, but uncommitted, terms and collaborated in colonial and diplomatic affairs.

The decision to stay in Egypt

In April 1888, the Suez Convention was signed between Turkey and the European powers making the Canal free and open whether in peace or war to the vessels of all countries. The Khedive (i.e., the British government) had

insisted on, and was given, the right to take any measures which he saw fit to secure the defence of Egypt.[87] The provisions of this Convention were framed to meet the conditions which were expected to subsist subsequent to the evacuation of Egypt by Britain.[88] During the middle of 1889, the French approached London for a settlement accepting the terms which Drummond-Wolff had asked for in 1887 and the Porte had refused. But the French ambassador was informed that there could be no more talk of withdrawal from Egypt on old terms. The question arises as to what made the British government change its policy during this year. The foremost reason was stated by Randolph Churchill much earlier: 'We shall never give up India and we shall stay in Egypt for a long time to come'.[89] The British government always feared that if it withdrew from Egypt and the Ottoman Empire was partitioned, then the Canal might fall into the hands of another power.[90] But the promise of early evacuation had put a great strain on British diplomacy. Britain needed a majority of votes on the Financial Commission, and this made British dependent on Germany's goodwill. Bismarck extracted the full price for this co-operation, demanding compliance from Britain with Germany's aims. Gladstone had complained repeatedly that Bismarck virtually 'tortured' Britain over Egypt, while Salisbury expressed irritation at the Bismarckian habit of *chantage*.[91] In November 1889, the threat to Mediterranean interests seemed grave enough to the British government to make it reinforce the Mediterranean fleet. The very next month, the Admiralty decided that the Channel Squadron was to be considered as an adjunct to the Mediterranean fleet in case of war with France.[92] Assertion of control over Egypt could relieve Britain of such anxieties.

The situation within Egypt also pointed to the wisdom of the continuance of control over Egypt. In 1885 Salisbury had referred to 'our hated presence' in Egypt in the context of the reaction of the European powers to occupation.[93] But even in the eyes of the people of Egypt, it was becoming a 'hated presence'. Nationalist movements tend to have momentums of their own and cannot be switched off. Feelings against alien control were acquiring deeper roots. In this situation, only continued occupation, would enable the British to keep the lid on the unresolved internal crisis and thus retain supremacy. Moreover, in 1889, for the first time since 1882, Egyptian finances showed a surplus.[94] Thereafter, the occupation of Egypt seemed less of a liability, both financially and politically. Although France was still hostile and Britain still required the consent of a majority of the powers to introduce new financial measures, there was far less urgency to secure their support. In this background the warm altruistic jargon that only the 'beneficent' British administration could provide 'law and order' became more acceptable. By the end of the decade, only Gladstone and his old guard continued to stick to the idea of withdrawal. Even Joseph Chamberlain, who had been a most uncompromising critic of imperial policy, turned into a fierce retentionist. In a public speech at the Guildhall in November 1889, Salisbury announced that the British government would pursue the task it had undertaken in Egypt irrespective of whether it were assisted or obstructed by other powers.[95]

The partition of Africa, 1889–92

With the decision to stay in Egypt, the British government discovered vital interests in the heart of Africa also. It was believed that whoever held control over the Sudan and the source of the Nile would have the power to starve Egypt of water and thus would, by sheer force of its geographical situation, dominate Egypt. Until the Dervishes under the leadership of the Mahdi controlled the Sudan, there was no reason to fear because they did not have either the arms or technology to cut off the flow of the Nile. But, as Baring wrote and Salisbury concurred, the establishment of a 'civilised' power in the Sudan on the Nile valley would be a calamity to Egypt.[96] If Britain was to hold on to Egypt, it could not afford to let any European power acquire any area as far south as the headwaters of the Nile in the Uganda region.

At the time of Kirk's mission to East Africa in 1884, Granville and Dilke at the Foreign Office and Hamilton at the Admiralty, had urged that from the Indian Empire's point of view, Britain should pursue its interests in East Africa at the expense of those in West Africa.[97] But the partition of 1884–8 took place almost without Britain's participation because of the need to ensure the support of Germany. Once the idea of holding onto Egypt began to acquire shape, the need for Germany's support decreased. But Britain could not remain unconcerned about Africa because the other powers had begun to take interest there. By this time, chartered companies were being formed as the means of supporting overseas ventures at minimum cost. The Imperial British East Africa Company was established in 1888 with McKinnon as chairman, and the next year a royal charter was granted to Cecil Rhode's British South Africa Company. But a feeling began to grow in London that in East Africa the German company was making better progress. The German company carved out an extensive empire on the mainland opposite Zanzibar, established a protectorate over Witu and was contemplating expansion towards the Great Lakes.[98] In the process, there were frequent clashes with British commercial interests. By this time, Rhodes had begun to envision a railway from Cape to Cairo and linked it to the acquisition of territory in Zambesia. This was the background in which Salisbury decided to negotiate with Germany. In January 1889, while dropping hints about an Anglo-German alliance, Bismarck had mentioned that he was tired of colonial quarrels and flag-hoistings and that he wanted to settle colonial questions.[99] Thereafter, the matter was taken up in great earnest. However, various issues were settled only after Bismarck's fall.

In March 1888, Kaiser William I died. His successor, Frederick William, survived him by barely three months. The new Kaiser William II was an apt representative of a new Germany that was conscious of its growing power and was impatient for recognition. In March 1890, Bismarck 'resigned' on a domestic issue. But this did not cause any noticeable change in the attitude of either Britain or Germany as far as negotiations over colonial affairs were concerned. The men of 'the new course' in Germany – Caprivi, the new Chancellor, Marschall, the Foreign Minister, and Holstein – were all keen on settling colonial affairs and generally on a successful understanding with Britain.

The negotiations between these two countries coincided with the German decision not to renew the Reinsurance Treaty with Russia. Salisbury offered to hand over the island of Heligoland[100] in the North Sea in return for recognition of British claims to some areas in East Africa. This was at a time when the Germans were cutting the Kiel Canal and were finding it humiliating that an island so near their country should be in foreign hands. Besides, the acquisition of this island seemed important for covering the eastern access to the new Canal. Kaiser William II found the bait irresistible. Besides, after the decision not to renew the Reinsurance Treaty, Germany needed Britain's goodwill more than ever. Negotiations were carried on during the summer of 1890 during which the British government altered the definition of western boundary from the basin of the Nile to 'the western watershed of the Nile'. Thus the Nile was sealed off from the Germans not only at its headquarters in Uganda, but also throughout its upper courses. Neither from the west through Bahr-e-Ghazal, nor from the east through Abyssinia and Zanzibar, could any European power threaten the valley.[101] In other words, in exchange for Heligoland, the Germans recognised a British protectorate over Zanzibar and the areas on the Upper Nile, later called Uganda and Kenya.[102]

Within the Cabinet, there was no consensus over colonial policy. Many ministers showed hostility towards Germany's claims and opposed the proposal to cede Heligoland. Salisbury expected opposition to the agreement from the House of Commons. But, to his relief, the attack in the House of Commons was 'of the guerrilla order'.[103] Only 61 members voted against the agreement.[104] The members of various parties were ready to hang together in pursuit of what was perceived to be national interest, in this case the defence of the short as well as the long routes to India. Salisbury also made efforts to get the consent of France and Italy to this settlement. France had been one of the signatories to the Treaty of 1862 to regulate the affairs of Zanzibar. Salisbury was able to get the approval of France in return for conceding a free hand in Madagascar and huge territories in western Sudan. To keep France away from the source of the Nile, Britain leased a part of southern Sudan to King Leopold of the Belgians. Salisbury found it difficult to get the consent of the Italian government under Crispi because Italy had been taking an interest in Abyssinia. But a treaty was signed after Rudini succeeded him, under which British and Italian spheres of interest were defined from Kismayu on the Indian Ocean to the Red Sea. In German colonial circles, this agreement was received with dismay. It led almost directly to the formation of the ultra-chauvinistic and Anglophobic Pan-German League, which was to maintain unremitting pressure upon the government to pay due regard to Germany's interest abroad.[105]

Salisbury had a daunting agenda. Britain was friendless on the continent. Its policy makers were called upon to guard Britain's most prized possession – the Indian Empire – against Russia's onslaught without having the military means to do so, and to guard Britain's interests in the Ottoman Empire when it seemed difficult either to prop it up or to ensure its goodwill. About Salisbury's attitude

to this, a sentence of his, penned in 1887, is often quoted: 'Whatever happens will be for the worse and therefore it is in our interest that as little should happen as possible'.[106] To describe his foreign policy, historians have tended to use various epithets with negative connotations like 'spineless', 'reticent', 'a policy of obeisance' and 'a policy lacking vigour'. His preference for leaning on the Triple Alliance without formally joining it is taken as a proof of his lack of firmness. But the policies Salisbury adopted served Britain's interests extremely well. He did not resort to a policy of bombast after the fashion of Disraeli or to exposition of moral values in the manner of Gladstone. His was a pragmatic, flexible, far-sighted and low-risk policy, which enabled him to guard the country's status as a great power. Britain was not likely to gain by formalising relations with the Triple Alliance. He created an accord *a quatre* that was likely to restrain Russia's advance in Central Asia by forcing Russia to keep a part of its army on its European frontiers. At the same time, it saved Britain from assuming any obligation to assist Germany in a war against France. In short, he got the advantages of Germany's friendship without the encumbering engagements of an alliance. Avoidance of an alliance with Germany is not proof of lackadaisical policy but of sound statesmanship.

Many of the decisions taken by his government produced positively decisive results. It adopted the two-power standard, which remained the bottom line for all decisions relating to the size of the navy for at least two decades. It took the bold decision to stay in Egypt, thus bringing a long, cumbersome, embarrassing period of uncertainty to an end. This was followed by decisive action in the direction of bringing the valley of the Nile and the East African coast under Britain's control. In 1885 Bismarck had turned down Britain's overture for an alliance, believing Britain to be *a quantité negligeable* in European politics.[107] Four years later, Salisbury turned down Bismarck's offer politely, but firmly, and from a position of strength. What is even more remarkable, in the eyes of German statesmen, Britain remained a friend and a potential ally. When he made the colonial bargain with Germany, he did not merely exchange Heligoland for Zanzibar but rather ensured the security of Egypt by establishing Britain's sway over the Nile basin. He made many attempts to patiently negotiate an agreement with Russia over Persia and Afghanistan. The need to improve relations with Russia seemed more pressing when, towards the end of his second tenure, Salisbury began to feel that even with the concurrence of the central powers it might not be possible to adopt the Black Sea strategy. In case the British fleet was engaged in the eastern Mediterranean, the French fleet at Toulon would not only be in a position to attack the British fleet in the rear, it could escape into the Atlantic and thus pose a threat to the British Isles. In other words, in attempting to defend the empire, the government might be making the homeland vulnerable.[108] In 1891, he invited the French fleet to visit Portsmouth on its way back from the sensational visit to Kronstadt. His aim, as he wrote to the Queen, was to show 'that England had no antipathy to France or any partisanship against her'.[109] He seems to have realised that the real security for Britain and its empire lay

in some arrangement with Russia and France. This is what Britain ultimately did; but the path was long, uncertain and tedious. For the moment, Britain's two enemies of long standing seemed to be joining hands. Britain's reaction to this development moulded Britain's policy during the decade that followed. This forms the theme of the next chapter.

5 Facing the Franco-Russian combine, 1892–8

In August 1892, when Gladstone kissed the Queen's hands for the fourth time, the Franco-Russian Alliance was already in the offing. During the last week of July 1891, a French squadron had visited Kronstadt and was accorded an enthusiastic welcome there. A month later, in August, there was an exchange of letters between the two governments. If peace was threatened, the two powers agreed not merely to consult each other but also 'to agree on measures' to be taken. A year later, during the month when Gladstone formed the government, a military convention was signed between the generals of the two countries. Under this, Russia promised support to France even against Germany alone. In return, the French agreed to mobilise (though not necessarily to go to war) even if Austria-Hungary alone mobilised against Russia.[1] The convention was to last as long as the Triple Alliance, though neither France nor Russia knew the term of the latter. Tsar Alexander, basically because of his misgivings regarding allying with a republican state, gave his approval only in December 1893, to which the French reciprocated on 4 January 1894.[2] This joined Russia and France firmly through a military convention and formal alliance. The negotiations leading to this alliance, as in all such cases, were carried on secretly. In fact, the first public mention of the alliance was made only in mid-1895. But the Kronstadt visit of the French fleet had been a public affair, and from reports in the French press, Britain and Germany were quick to sense that friendly exchanges had taken place between the two countries. After the Alliance was signed, the European powers did not know its terms, but they all tried to decipher what it stood for. From 1894, all questions in diplomacy centred on the intentions of France and Russia.

In Britain, during the six-year period from 1892 to 1898, the Liberals were in power for the first three years and the Conservatives thereafter. The success of the Liberals had given rise to anxieties that a policy of imperial retreat might be in the offing. In the election campaign, the Liberals had made it clear that they stood for opposition to foreign ventures, the system of alliances and control over Egypt. The French saw themselves as beneficiaries of this programme, while Germany remained apprehensive about the intentions of the government. In practice, however, nothing changed. The Liberal Unionists went over to the Conservatives. The views of the Liberal Imperialists, who remained in the

Liberal Party, were eventually to be close to those of their Tory opponents. Moreover, Gladstone appointed Archibald Philip Primrose, the fifth Earl of Rosebery, as Foreign Secretary. Rosebery wanted to take a firm line. He was patently anxious to convince observers that there would be continuity in foreign policy, so much so that he asked Salisbury not to tell him about the contents of the Mediterranean Agreements so that he could deny their existence when questioned.[3] One reason for offering him the portfolio was that he had vast knowledge about the empire.[4] He liked the label 'Liberal Imperialist',[5] and wanted the Liberals to associate themselves with 'the new sentiment for empire which occupies the nation'. In March 1894, Gladstone resigned and Rosebery became the Prime Minister. Kimberley moved to the Foreign Office. He was knowledgeable about the empire because he had been the Colonial Secretary twice and then India Secretary in all Liberal governments since December 1882.

On 25 June 1895, Salisbury returned to premiership. He dissolved the House in order to gain parliamentary strength. He formed a government with the Liberal Unionists, and together they had an overwhelming majority in the House.[6] At this stage he was at the peak of his career, and was considered the most influential diplomat in Europe.[7] But he could not enjoy the same free hand in foreign policy that he had enjoyed between 1887 and 1892. He looked weary, while his Cabinet colleagues became more assertive. Joseph Chamberlain, the leader of the Liberal Unionists in the Commons, became so influential that he was regarded as virtual co-premier. He chose to become Colonial Secretary. This office had not been very important in the immediate past, when major negotiations in Africa had been handled by the Foreign Office. In joining the Colonial Office, Chamberlain's aim was to inject life into this 'neglected estate'. George Goschen at the Admiralty interfered in matters relating to foreign policy. Joseph Chamberlain, Hicks Beach and Hartington,[8] the Colonial Secretary, the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Lord President respectively, were vocal in imperial affairs and often advocated more extreme alternatives than Salisbury favoured.

This was the time when European powers were showing an irresistible urge to acquire colonies. Even in Britain, enthusiasm for imperial ventures was distinctly greater than before. The politicians who were coming to power and their business, social and intellectual supporters were keen to enhance Britain's world interests, which seemed increasingly threatened by the colonial ambitions and trade rivalries of other European powers. Factors like growth of the yellow press catering to mass readership and the spread of 'scientific' social Darwinist notions of international relations had made average Britons ever more sensitive about their country's standing in the world. All this manifested itself in the demand for more assertive diplomacy. Any concessions, any slights – real or imagined – were deeply resented. It is this that explains the hysterical and vitriolic reaction of the British press at the time of the Kruger telegram in January 1896 and the Fashoda 'incident' in July 1898. Those called upon to decide the country's foreign and imperial policies seemed baffled by the sheer weight and number of external problems. Rosebery complained: 'Our foreign policy has become more

of a colonial policy and is becoming every day more entwined with our colonial interests than has ever been the case before.'[9] In 1895, when Britain abstained from intervention in the Far East, he explained: 'For did we not strictly limit the principle of intervention, we should always be simultaneously engaged in some forty wars.'[10] Even Salisbury, who was known for cautious and pragmatic responses, expressed, at times, a very predatory view of international relations. In his famous 'living nations speech' he said: 'For one reason or another – from the necessities of politics or under the pretence of philanthropy – the living nations will gradually encroach on the territory of the dying…'[11] As imperial possessions came to be regarded as the hallmark of great nations more than ever before, the guarding of the Raj became more important.

Influence on strategy

France and Russia had not really combined against Britain but, in London as everywhere, this combination was looked upon as an anti-British move. The visit of the Russian squadron to Toulon had provoked wild demonstrations of Franco-Russian solidarity as well as outpourings of anti-British feelings. Britain had looked upon these two countries as the restless powers which were likely to gain from any upheaval in Europe. France had an interest in regaining Alsace and Lorraine, and Russia in the break-up of the Ottoman Empire. Until this time, British strategists had held that singly or in concert, these two countries were really not in a position to pose any threat to the British Isles. In 1888 and 1889, when the contingency of the French seizing London by a *coup de main* was discussed at the Cabinet level, it was accepted that in view of the strength of the navy, the invasion of the United Kingdom by France was so much beyond the realm of reasonable probability as not to be worth considering.[12]

By 1892, however, the situation had undergone a sea-change as a result of several factors: the near certainty of French naval assistance to its Russian ally, the growth in the size of the Russian fleet and the certainty that the Turks would not be able to follow an independent policy. In the spring of 1892, Brackenbury's successor as the Director of Military Intelligence, General E.F. Chapman, and the Director of Naval Intelligence, Captain C.A.G. Bridge, reported that in the new situation, if the British fleet was employed at the eastern end of the Mediterranean, the French fleet at Toulon could escape into the Atlantic and the English Channel where it could pose a great peril to Britain.[13] In view of this contingency, many new schools of thought emerged amongst strategists. The Channel School wanted the channel squadron to be strengthened. The Mediterranean School held that the only way of perpetuating English naval supremacy in the Mediterranean was by keeping a fleet there at least equal to the French fleet. The 'Scuttlers' wanted the Admiralty to admit that, in the time of war, they could not hold the Mediterranean and wanted to abandon the Mediterranean in case of war. They believed that in time of war, the government would have to rely on the Cape route for commerce and communications with India. London did not really fear any sudden, unprovoked

war of aggression, but British statesmen became concerned about the consequences of co-operation between France and Russia outside Europe. Britain's interests clashed with theirs in so many areas that, to Britain, it seemed that its two rivals had joined hands. In this connection, some historians have tended to argue that this alliance did little to worsen Britain's position. They have advanced two types of arguments: one, that France and Russia were reluctant to get involved in each other's imperial disputes,[14] and, two, that in the imperial field, their areas of rivalry did not overlap.[15] While Russia took interest in the Balkans and in Central Asia from Afghanistan to Tibet, the chief interests of France lay in Egypt and other parts of Africa, and in South-East Asia. But there were reasons to view this combine with anxiety. Though the interests of France and Russia lay in different geographical regions, taken together these regions of interest lay along the frontiers of the Indian Empire from its eastern to its western end, and along the routes to India.

In fact, this turned the problem of guarding the Raj into a nightmare. The military strategists argued that Britain's military establishment fell far short of Britain's needs. General Roberts, who had been commander-in-chief of the army in India during 1885–92, had always articulated the view that in the event of war with Russia, the decisive battle would have to be fought beyond the northwest frontier of India. He had no faith in the success of ancillary operations in the Baltic, the Persian Gulf and the Black Sea. For the defence of India against Russia, he wanted that Britain should always be able to fortify India and send reinforcements, and that the British army and colonial forces be converted into one gigantic reserve for the Indian army.[16] As commander-in-chief, he pressed London to accept his views, and he got full support from Chapman.[17] As we shall see, this was not an easy task. Britain simply did not have the men or money to send necessary reinforcements. After the alliance between France and Russia, it was realised that the French navy would hamper the movement of troops from Britain to India in the case of war with Russia in Central Asia or in case of an internal upheaval like that of 1857.

The Franco-Russian collaboration made even the Black Sea strategy redundant. During the Crimean War, the British fleet had enjoyed free passage through the straits because of its alliance with the Turks and free movement in the Mediterranean because of its alliance with France. Even so, the British had found it extremely difficult to fight the Russians. By 1890, these conditions did not obtain. Since the occupation of Egypt, relations with Turkey as well as France had come under severe strain. The Turks had begun to fortify the Straits 'with the guns pointing to the Mediterranean', as Gordon Martel puts it.[18] It seemed that it was not possible for Britain to operate in the Eastern Mediterranean. The admirals no longer considered the question of whether it was possible to force the straits. Instead, they were preoccupied with the question whether or not the Mediterranean would have to be abandoned altogether in the event of war. In 1892, in a joint report of the Directors of Military Intelligence and Naval Intelligence regarding Britain's ability to protect Constantinople, it was concluded that:

> …unless we had the concurrence of France which is of course an absurd hypothesis, or unless we had first destroyed the French fleet at Toulon, which at all events must be a very distant contingency, it is not legitimate for us to employ our fleet at the eastern end of the Mediterranean.[19]

It was for Salisbury to draw the conclusion that the protection of Constantinople from Russian conquest, which had been the turning point of the policy of this country for forty years and to a certain extent forty years before that, was no longer feasible. He continued, 'if Russia were mistress of Constantinople…the route to India through the Suez Canal would be so much exposed as not to be available except in times of profoundest peace'.[20]

The certainty of French naval assistance to Russia in the event of complications in the Near East or Russia's thrust towards India, and the stationing of a Russian Squadron at Toulon since October 1893, had made the situation worse. By this time Russia had created the Black Sea Fleet which practically had the right to enter the Mediterranean any time. It was also believed that Russia's fleet in the Baltic had become formidable. It could reach Constantinople by sea. This meant that to exercise pressure on the Sultan, Russia would not have to use the long land route. Thus, much before the majority in the Cabinet had contemplated giving up the policy of 'splendid isolation', strategists had reached the conclusion that without allies Britain could no longer meet the dangers of the future. In 1893 itself, when Russia made a formal claim to territories in the Pamir region and France threatened Bangkok, it seemed that the two allies were taking concerted action against Britain at the two extremes of the Indian Empire. To British statesmen and strategists, the two antagonists seemed to pose a challenge unparalleled since Napoleon and Alexander met at Tilsit in 1807. Beside this, all other dangers seemed minor annoyances. The noisy movements of the Germans in Africa, Asia and the Pacific were not yet viewed as threats to the security of the British Isles or the British Empire. In fact, the Germans found the attitude of Rosebery and Kimberley annoyingly condescending.[21] The Americans, whose strength was obviously increasing, were at most irritating in the Caribbean. Japan by now was causing some uncertainty over its intentions in China. The Spanish were, at worst, rude about Gibraltar.

To face the Franco-Russian combine, the British government took steps in two directions. It decided to further enlarge the Royal Navy, and it decided to revamp Britain's international position.

Strengthening the naval position

The exchange of visits by the Russian and French fleets made the press and the public notice that the circumstances were changing. By 1893, concern began to be expressed about the inadequacies of Britain's naval position.[22] The Naval Intelligence warned that if existing naval programmes of these countries continued apace, within two years, Britain would go from a two-battleship advantage over France and Russia to a three-battleship disadvantage. In

December 1893, there was a heated debate in Parliament, during which the Conservative opposition accused the government of doing nothing to offset an increasingly unfavourable balance of forces in vital strategic areas.[23] In this background Earl Spencer, the First Lord of Admiralty, proposed a substantial increase in the pace of construction of ships. Gladstone opposed the proposal bitterly, but within a few months he was forced into retirement and a smaller version of Spencer's plan was adopted. Soon, this programme was enlarged to include a total of nine new first-class battleships, thus ensuring for the immediate future the maintenance of a slight numerical edge over the combined forces of France and Russia.[24] The programme had direct impact on foreign policy. The government could not opt for a strong foreign policy lest it result in an explosion, at least until these additional ships were ready. But the huge ship-building programmes of 1894 and after gave the British heavy numerical superiority over the Franco-Russian alliance.

Revamping Britain's international position

The Triple Alliance

In June 1891, the renewal of the Triple Alliance of Germany, Austria-Hungary and Italy was announced. At London, this combination was viewed as less of a menace than the Franco-Russian alliance. These countries were perceived as 'satisfied powers'. Italy did have territorial ambitions in North Africa, but these did not seem to threaten British interests. Besides, Germany had also looked upon the Franco-Russian Combine as a disquieting factor, and Wilhelmstrasse feared that it might be aimed against the central powers. It therefore tried to persuade Britain to join the Triple Alliance. A Quadruple Alliance of Britain, Germany, Austria-Hungary and Italy was likely to be a formidable combination.[25]

Rosebery made efforts to be on friendly terms with members of the Triple Alliance. At the same time he did not join them formally. He thus continued the policy that Salisbury followed during his second tenure, that of being with the Triple Alliance but not of it.[26] Why did Rosebery not join it? This has been explained in terms of exigencies of domestic political scene. It has been argued that any entanglement in Europe was likely to provoke hostile attacks from the Radicals in the Commons, and to make even the Liberal Unionists uneasy. But there were more pressing reasons for not joining the Triple Alliance than fear of causing political furore. Answering this question, Gordon Martel argues that the Franco-Russian front created a near perfect counterpoise to the Triple Alliance. Britain's presence on one side of the fulcrum would have disturbed the balance of power and emboldened the European powers to adopt an aggressive posture.[27] But it was not attachment to balance of power on principle or the fear of disturbing it that explains Britain's foreign policy during this period. Britain did not join the Triple Alliance simply because Britain's interests were not served by joining it. In fact, the very existence of the Triple Alliance (without Britain

joining it) served Britain's interests extremely well. It compelled both Russia and France to keep a major portion of their forces on their frontiers against Austria and Germany in Europe. This in itself was likely to restrain them from resorting to aggressive ventures elsewhere, and thus it provided relief to Britain in Asia and Africa. Moreover, in spite of sharing distrust of Russia, the areas of concern for Britain and Germany did not really coincide. Each of these powers wanted support in their own areas of concern: Britain to prevent Russia from advancing towards the frontiers of the Indian Empire, the Mediterranean and the Persian Gulf, and Germany to prevent Russia from becoming too bold on its European frontiers. Conversely, each of the powers gained if Russia was preoccupied in the other's area of concern. There could be no alliance where no party gained by co-operation.

Germany made efforts to strengthen the bonds established in 1887 and worked to secure Britain's support for Italy in the Mediterranean and for Austria in the Balkans. Britain was not interested in promising naval co-operation in the Mediterranean to Germany's two weak and nervous alliance partners.[28] In any case, with increasing co-operation between France and Russia and their increasing naval strength, Italy's position had become even more precarious. In February 1894, when Kalnoky, the Austro-Hungarian Foreign Minister, pressed Britain to clarify its policy with regard to the Straits and Constantinople, Rosebery made it clear that Britain would co-operate if Britain could count on the Triple Alliance to prevent France from taking part in the struggle. This could be done only if Germany joined. Germany was not willing to consider any such suggestion unless Britain first joined the Triple Alliance. Thereafter, negotiations broke down. Both the powers resorted to silent retaliation against supposedly unfriendly acts in Congo, Egypt and Transvaal. When negotiations were carried on these issues during 1893–4, Germany tried to move closer to France, while on questions relating to Central Asia, Germany tried to prevent co-operation between Britain and Russia by drawing Britain's attention repeatedly to cases of co-operation between France and Russia.[29] In 1896, the Germans welcomed the success of the Conservatives. The ascendancy of the Conservatives in Britain seemed to narrow the ideological gap between the two nations. On his part, Salisbury made friendly noises about the desire to join the Triple Alliance.[30] But improvement in Anglo-German relations was, at best, temporary.

The Siamese crisis

The first real crisis the Liberal government was called upon to face in foreign affairs was the Siamese crisis in July 1893. It concerned the defence of the eastern frontier of the Indian Empire where, by 1886, the British had established control over the whole of Burma. In 1887, the French had created Indo-China by joining together Cochin, Annam and Tonkin. Subsequently, they remained busy in rounding off the western frontier of their empire in southeast Asia. In this process, they were pressing upon Siam, which Britain wanted to retain as a buffer between their own and the French Empires in Asia. In 1889, and again in

1892, W.H. Waddington, the French ambassador in London, approached Salisbury proposing that Siam be divided into British and French spheres of influence.[31] This would have created a common frontier between the British and French Empires. London had always opposed any such attempt. The government of India endorsed this policy, and let London know that a coterminous frontier with France would impose too heavy a burden on India. It would require a garrison of three regiments, expenditure of an additional £2 million a year and construction of a railway line.[32] The British government wanted Siam to continue as a viable buffer state. In fact, Salisbury's government had not permitted the Straits Settlements Administration to annex Pehang, Kelatin and Tringam, which bordered on Siam and where Siam's suzerainty was vague,[33] so as not to weaken or irritate the Siamese government.

In 1893, however, the French government decided to act. Demanding annexation of territories on the east bank of River Mekong, it invaded Siam. It announced a blockade of Bangkok and, it seems, ordered British gunboats to move out of the Mekong River. On 21 July the British minister at Bangkok sent a telegram warning the government at London 'to expect fighting unless British government…prevented it'.[34] The British government decided not to intervene, and this encouraged France to go ahead alone. French gunboats subjected Bangkok to several days of blockade in early August. The Siamese submitted in total defeat, and the French were able to annex the region east of the Mekong.

Contemporaries as well as historians have condemned Rosebery's attitude as too cautious, defensive and vacillating.[35] But this was not so. In fact, no British government could have been indifferent when the defence of India was at stake. Gordon Martel, who has done extensive research on Rosebery's foreign policy, has argued that far from vacillating, Rosebery assumed a very strong, indeed a bellicose posture, short of intervening directly and immediately.[36] Martel shows that Rosebery confessed later to Dufferin, who was British ambassador at Paris at that time and had been the Governor-General of India when Britain had annexed Upper Burma, 'we were moving fast to a word I shudder to pronounce, which was "war"'.[37] He also talked of carrying on a silent war – 'une guerre sourde' – all over the world.[38] No European country could be allowed to establish a frontier coterminous with the frontiers of the Indian Empire. He was not frightened by the prospect of French retaliation in Europe or Egypt, but instead expected to frighten them. It is significant that neither Gladstone nor the Cabinet restrained Rosebery at any stage. The threat of 'silent war' was embodied in a printed despatch available to all in the Cabinet to see.[39] He adopted this belligerent posture in spite of the fact that the government of India repeatedly expressed its inability to assist Britain in the war or to take on the administration of more regions.[40] The British government was also fully aware of the difficulties of providing the necessary manpower to defend the northwest frontier. Yet, Rosebery told Gladstone that 'if we are firm, the French will give way'.[41] The firm stand on the part of Rosebery was instrumental in diffusing this crisis. It enabled the French Foreign Minister Develle to take a stiff stand against those in Paris who advocated a policy of expansion. By 31 July, he made it clear

that Britain was determined to maintain Siam as a buffer state. Thereafter, France lifted the blockade of Bangkok. In August, Develle assured Dufferin that he regarded the Siamese question as buried.[42] France did annex the eastern part of Siam, but as far as Britain was concerned, the state of Siam that was left was considered sufficient to act as a 'tolerable buffer' between the Indian Empire and the new frontier of the French Empire.

Patrick Tuck has argued that Siam came closer to losing its independence during the nineteenth century than has hitherto been realised primarily because the British were not prepared to go to war to preserve its existence.[43] This is correct. From this, Tuck concludes that Siam always ranked lower in British priorities than other frontier states such as Afghanistan or Persia. The level of anxiety regarding security of the eastern frontier of India against France was certainly lower. But the reasons have nothing to do with the relative insignificance of Siam. The reasons relate to grand strategy. Persia and Afghanistan were seen as buffer states against the expansion of Russia, which was a sprawling land power and was impervious to attack by the British navy. By contrast, French colonies were dependent on constant sea communication with the mother country, which Britain could always disrupt. Secondly, for France, Germany was the enemy nearer home and, therefore, it was not in a position to really challenge Britain.[44] It was for these reasons that, though Britain was keen to maintain Siam as a neutral buffer, it saw no point in threatening war or making preparations for war as it had done at the time of the Penjdeh crisis.

It has also been said that this crisis had a direct impact on Anglo-German relations. When the news of French gunboats at Bangkok reached London, Kaiser William II was at Windsor and Rosebery appealed to him for assistance against France. The Kaiser was so alarmed by the panicky reaction of the British government that he concluded that one could not depend on the British government under the Liberals. He felt that Britain had nearly involved Germany in a general war. After this, he abandoned the policy of cultivating Britain, which he had been following for three years. He turned to alternative means of keeping France and Russia in check.[45] He tried to drive a wedge between France and Britain by pushing France into an open clash with Britain on imperial issues in Africa. Martel has dismissed this whole episode centring on Rosebery's appeal to the Kaiser as a concoction. He says that it does not fit into the available evidence on Rosebery's whole diplomatic design.[46] Rosebery believed that the members of the Triple Alliance should not be allowed to think that Britain depended on them for support outside Europe. In fact, he told the Queen that it was becoming of Her Majesty's dignity to settle the matter without appealing to the Triple Alliance.[47]

The Pamir Tangle

The Liberal government was called upon to face the problem of Russia's expansion at the other end of the Indian Empire, the northwest, also. The Boundary Commission of 1885 had settled the boundary between Afghanistan and Russia

from the Zulfiqar Pass to the Oxus, but the rest of the frontier had remained undefined. In the mountainous and desolate region of the Pamirs, there were territories that were virtually no man's lands. The government of India wanted the Afghans or the Chinese to fill these gaps so as to stall the possibility of the establishment of a co-terminus frontier between Russia and the Indian Empire. Meanwhile, both Britain and Russia continued to expand in this region. Russia expanded in the Pamirs,[48] and in 1888 the Trans-Caspian railway was completed up to Samarkand and branches connected it to Tashkent and Adijan in the vicinity of China's frontier. The Trans-Caucasian railway to Julfa was also commenced. The government of India also adopted a bold forward policy aimed at establishing control over small states like Hunza, Nagar, Chitral and Gilgit, lying to the west and northwest of Kashmir and northeast of Afghanistan. In 1889, an army contingent was stationed at Gilgit. Within two years, Hunza and Nagar were occupied.[49] In 1892, taking advantage of a succession dispute in Chitral, an expedition was sent there from Gilgit and a small contingent of the army was placed in Chitral.[50]

The Amir of Afghanistan, Abdur Rahman, resented the expansion of the British and Russians to areas near his territory.[51] He had refused to allow British officers to be stationed near his frontier, to receive any mission or to permit the British to lay a telegraph line between Peshawar and Kabul. He objected to the construction of the railway line without his prior consent to Chaman which, he held, fell in Afghan territory. He resented the minatory tone of communications from Calcutta.[52] He also tried to establish monopolies over trade in different items and began to impose heavy taxes on traders which, in turn, was resented by the British.[53] The basic problem was that while the Amir of Afghanistan looked upon himself as a sovereign ruler, the British government looked upon him as a vassal. Meanwhile, the Russian government was insisting that the Amir vacate Roshan and Shignan, over which the British government had recognised Russia's authority under the agreement of 1873. This issue was becoming embarrassing for the British. To discuss all these matters, the government of India decided to send General Roberts to Kabul. In July 1892, it asked the Amir to receive him in the autumn of that year.[54]

At this stage, in August, the Liberals came to power. The first reaction of the Liberal government was one of irritation at this entanglement. An indignant Gladstone commented that he had never heard of the Pamirs.[55] But the issue could not be left on the table because Russia was seen as threatening the security of the Indian Empire. Rosebery expressed the general mood when, within days of assuming office, he wrote to Kimberley, 'Her Majesty's Government cannot remain passive.'[56] It is relevant to underline here that the Liberal government, which was to divide on every issue of foreign policy for the next three years, stood united over this. Gladstone, Rosebery, Kimberley and Campbell-Bannerman opposed the proposal to send General Roberts to Kabul to negotiate with the Amir. They felt that as the foremost advocate of the forward policy, Roberts would not treat the Amir sympathetically and would only drive him into the arms of Russia.[57] The British government torpedoed the proposal by not

extending the term of Roberts beyond March 1893. It did not relent even when Lansdowne, the Viceroy, threatened to resign.[58] The government of India also failed to persuade the Amir to receive the mission.[59] It is interesting that Rosebery tried to use the unanimity of opinion against Russia in the Cabinet to persuade the government of India to send a military expedition to the Pamirs.[60] His aim was to demonstrate the grit of Britain to the members of the Triple Alliance by showing that he could make Russia listen without relying on the assistance of other European countries.[61] The idea appealed also because such an expedition would have been paid for out of Indian revenues. The government of India, however, firmly opposed the proposal and expressed itself in favour of a negotiated settlement of the Pamir tangle.[62] In a situation in which the Amir's attitude was one of sulky acquiescence, Russia's one of assertiveness and the government of India's one of reluctance to intervene militarily, the British government adopted a multi-pronged strategy of encouraging China to assert itself, negotiating with Afghanistan and, finally, settling the matter with Russia.

At the time, the Manchu government in China was being called upon to face Russia's expansion in Manchuria, France's expansion in Indo-China and Japan's expansion in Korea. Britain was also watching Russia's penetration towards the Pacific with concern. Until the 1890s, the British had controlled the Pacific side of China by naval supremacy. But the commencement of the construction of the Trans-Siberian railway in 1891 had made it obvious that Russia was penetrating into this region from the north-west of China. The British government tried to encourage China to occupy the no-man's land in the Pamirs. China had a strong legal position; under a protocol of 1884, Russia had accepted Chinese suzerainty over many strategic passes in the Pamir region.[63] But in 1891 the Chinese, faced with an Afghan force, had meekly withdrawn from their post at Somatosh. This had made both London and Calcutta sceptical about using Chinese claims as a means of stemming the tide of Russia's expansion.[64] It was felt that there was no point in cultivating the Manchu government because it was not able to control the governors in distant areas. In any case, the Chinese government was facing foreign pressure nearer its centre – in Korea and Manchuria – and was not in a position to exert influence over remote frontiers. The government of India insisted that it was best to be militarily prepared for facing any challenge to its position on the Indian frontier, and Lansdowne pointed to the awkwardness of substituting a Chinese alliance for this basic necessity.[65]

In these circumstances, the British government was reduced to urging St Petersburg to complete the process of delimitation of the frontier commenced in 1885. This had many advantages, including settling the question of Russia's expansion and improving relations with Russia, as well as reducing Britain's dependence on the Triple Alliance. Russia accepted the suggestion because it wanted to forestall the eventuality of Britain joining the Triple Alliance. Moreover, at this time France was being rocked by the Panama Canal scandal, which strengthened the Tsar's misgivings about allying with a republican state. The Amir acquiesced because he was weary of Russia's pressure on his frontier. Ultimately, a mission was sent to Kabul under Mortimer Durand, the Secretary

to the government of India in the Foreign Department. It reached Kabul in October 1893. Within a month, Durand was able to sign an agreement with the Amir under which the Amir agreed to relinquish the territories beyond the Oxus which had been under his occupation. An agreement was signed defining the Indo-Afghan frontier. On matters relating to trade, railways, telegraphs and so on, Durand did not achieve much success, but he succeeded in convincing the Amir of the need for co-operation between the two countries.[66] The mission eased tension between Britain and Russia to the point where in 1894, Rosebery said in a public speech that relations with Russia had never been more hearty.[67] The two governments appointed a joint commission to mark the frontiers between Russia, Afghanistan and China. Afghanistan was placed in the position of a consenting party only.

The process of delimitation failed to create an atmosphere of mutual trust. This became clear on the issue of Chitral. In 1892, a small British force had been placed there, but the local leaders resented its presence and looked upon this action as an intrusion into their internal affairs. At this stage, the question arose as to whether Britain should continue to hold Chitral or withdraw. Lord Elgin, who had been appointed Viceroy in 1894 precisely because he was a Liberal and had no trust in the forward policy, as well as Sir George White, who had succeeded General Roberts as Commander-in-Chief, expressed themselves strongly against withdrawal. Their main argument was that any Anglo-Russian understanding was bound to be short-lived. They also used the Far Eastern card to support their case, arguing that unless Britain was strong on the northwest of India against Russia, Russia could use Britain's weakness to cajole Britain into supporting it in the Far East.[68] In the elections of 1895, the question of Chitral became an issue in Britain's party politics. It was openly said in the press that the purpose of the expedition was to establish effective British authority there so that, when any settlement was made with Russia, Britain could claim its right on the ground of effective possession.[69]

The process of delimitation of the frontier proved to be a long one. The British commissioner was instructed not to leave any gap between the Chinese and Afghan territories.[70] In 1895 the Pamirs Delimitation Agreement was concluded with Russia. In this demarcation, a narrow piece of Afghan territory was placed all the way along between the Russian and British Empires in Central Asia. Thus, the purpose of not having a contiguous frontier between the Russian Empire and Britain's Indian Empire was achieved.

Britain and the Sino-Japanese war

In the Far East, too, the Conservative government was called upon to face a new situation. During 1894–5, China and Japan fought a war in which Japan inflicted a humiliating defeat on China. The speed and completeness of Japan's victory shocked the whole world. In April 1895, the Treaty of Shimonoseki was signed between the two countries. It provided, amongst other things, for the complete independence of Korea, cession to Japan of Formosa, the southern tip

of Manchuria and some other territories, and the 'opening' of new ports. The Russian government saw in these terms a direct threat to its interests in Manchuria and proposed to Britain that they should co-operate in putting pressure on Japan to moderate the terms. When defeat of China had seemed imminent, Britain had proposed a joint intervention to maintain the balance of power in the Far East. But, at this stage, the British Cabinet decided not to act. This was not a manifestation of commitment to the policy of isolation. On this, Christopher Howard aptly comments that all powers decide on certain occasions not to collaborate with others in intervening at particular junctures if their interests so require.[71] There was no temptation to intervene even in defence of commercial interests in China. Britain's trade with China amounted to a mere 3 per cent of Britain's foreign trade, though it amounted to over 80 per cent of China's total trade.[72] It was also argued that a confident Japan might refuse to listen, and this could be a blow to Britain's prestige in the East. Britain could not afford this.[73] However, the decisive consideration seems to have been that Britain simply had no interest in curtailing the power and influence of Japan in the Far East and in improving Russia's standing. As Rosebery stated, it was unwise to alienate 'a power of great magnitude in those seas', especially one which had territorial interests to defend against Russia.[74] Any increase in Russia's power anywhere did not suit Britain in any case.

The Russians were annoyed. Ultimately, France and Germany replaced Britain in Russia's good graces. France was an ally. Germany saw in this proposal a chance to befriend Russia. The resultant 'Three Power Intervention' forced a revision of the Treaty of Shimonoseki to Japan's disadvantage. So far as its impact on Britain was concerned, this 'Triplice' unmistakably created the sceptre of a three-power combination against Britain in the Far East. Britain's isolation was brought home immediately on the issue of advancing a loan to China to enable it to pay the indemnity imposed under the Treaty of Shimonoseki. The British government had taken it for granted that, in view of its enormously preponderant commercial interests in China, it would be made a party to the proposal.[75] But, to its chagrin, it learnt that a loan had been advanced and Britain had been left out. This theme was replayed with even more menacing overtones following the Kaiser's telegram to President Kruger to which reference will be made in the section on South Africa.

The Eastern Question

In 1894, attention turned once again to the Near East when news about the revolt of Christians in Armenia and about its brutal suppression by the Turks began to reach European capitals. In Britain, it provoked public outcry, pressing the government to intervene to make the Ottomans introduce 'the reforms' promised under the Cyprus Convention of 1878. The Russian government also wanted the Ottomans to pacify the 'rebels' because a successful revolt in Armenia was likely to encourage similar revolts in Russia. This was the time when London and St Petersburg were carrying on talks on the Pamirs issue.

Rosebery did not care for the 'reforms', but he saw in this crisis an opportunity to placate his colleagues as also to improve relations with Russia by co-operating on this issue.[76] On his initiative, a commission of inquiry was formed on which Britain, France and Russia were represented. Before the commission reported, relations between Britain and Russia became strained on the issue of putting pressure on Japan. The commission did complete its work in 1895, but by this time the report had already become redundant.

By the time Salisbury became the Prime Minister in the summer of 1895, reports were reaching London that 'atrocities' were being perpetrated against the Armenians with a vengeance. This infused new life into Gladstone, who started a fresh campaign against the 'great assassin'. In this situation, Salisbury was called upon to justify his policy to his countrymen as well as to protect British interests in the Near East. He first tried to revive the policy of co-operation with Russia,[77] but when efforts in this direction did not succeed, he tried to put pressure on the Sultan. In mid-August, he warned the Sultan that he would make 'a grave and calamitous mistake' if he refused to listen to the advice of the European powers.[78] In order to intimidate the Sultan, he moved the British fleet from the Syrian Coast to Salonica.[79] He also got Cabinet approval for operations in the Red Sea.[80] By this time, Philip Currie was sending alarming reports about danger to the lives of Europeans.[81] Late in 1895, Salisbury urged Goschen, the Naval Lord, to send the British fleet through the Dardanelles to coerce the Sultan and to stall Russia's descent upon Constantinople. The Admiralty strongly opposed the proposal. The Cabinet also refused to send the British fleet. The Prime Minister felt so hurt that he said that he was 'cut to the heart'; he jibed that British ships were always to be kept wrapped in silver paper for fear of their being scratched.[82] In 1897, the question of renewal of the Mediterranean Agreements came up. Austria-Hungary wanted to revise the terms by including more binding engagements relating to the straits. Salisbury was willing to renew the Agreements as they stood. But he had reservations about enlarging their scope. Thereafter, Austria decided not to renew the Mediterranean Agreements.[83] Thus, the Anglo-Austrian entente regarding the Balkans came to an end. Subsequently, Austria made a settlement with Russia, the Muraviev-Goluchowski Agreement signed on 5 May 1897 under which the Balkans was put on ice.

Historians have tended to argue that during the period covered in this chapter, as Britain's position in Egypt became stronger, the British government began to lose interest in Constantinople and the Straits.[84] Several developments do point to this conclusion. First, the British government was becoming increasingly concerned that the Ottoman Empire could not sustain itself and that Britain did not possess the means to revamp it. Salisbury was convinced that the Ottoman Empire would not survive for long. He expressed contempt for the inertia at Constantinople very often. Second, the coming together of France and Russia had been a disquieting factor and had intensified consciousness of the lack of means at Britain's disposal to take a decisive stand at the Straits. In 1895, the Cabinet had refused to send British fleet to the straits. As already said, this

had perturbed Salisbury deeply. Third, the exchanges between Gladstone, Rosebery, Kimberley and the service chiefs during 1892–4 show a deep concern that there was nothing Britain could do to prevent the Russians from swooping down suddenly on Constantinople.[85] Salisbury is said to have told Hatzfeldt, the German ambassador at London, that he was prepared to let Russia occupy Constantinople and seek Egypt as compensation for Britain.[86]

But it is important to remember that in this extremely important geo-political region Britain's stake did not lie in the continuance or otherwise of the Ottoman Empire or in having control over Constantinople or Cairo or both. Britain's purpose was to have some means of preventing Russia from reaching the frontiers of India and ensuring security of the shorter route to India by preventing Russia from entrenching itself at Constantinople. The British government's policy has to be situated in this context. A few months after coming to power, in November 1895, the Conservative government established a Defence Committee of the Cabinet. It asked the Directors of Naval Intelligence and Military Intelligence to report on the measures to be taken to counteract the effects of a successful Russian occupation of Constantinople. The bulk of the arguments in their reports weighed against the conclusion that British occupation of Egypt could equalise or in any way affect acquisition of a position of influence and control at Constantinople by Russia.[87] In his memorandum, Admiral Beaumont wrote:

> Once the Black Sea is a Russian lake with the Dardanelles as her safe outlet, Russian influence and power will extend through Asia Minor and Syria, and England will be separated from India by the distance of the Cape route.[88]

When the ministers in the Cabinet did not allow Salisbury to send the British fleet up the Dardanelles in 1895 to intimidate the Sultan, the reason was not indifference to the fate of Constantinople. The reasons were that Currie's reports were considered unduly alarmist and that the Cabinet did not think that Russia's strike at Constantinople was imminent. In fact, as Salisbury himself wrote to the Queen, the Cabinet had agreed that the country might have to go to war in defence of the straits.[89] Further, Keith Wilson has discovered 'impressive and conclusive evidence' to argue that Salisbury did contemplate the break-up of the Ottoman Empire, but he further argues that Salisbury's 'dream' included not just control over Egypt for Britain but also over the southern slope of the Taurus with Syria and Mesopotamia.[90] In the event of partition of the Ottoman Empire, Salisbury thus thought not just of Egypt but of British domination over the entire east Mediterranean coast and Mesopotamia with 'Dardanelles open to all the Powers'. This was a plan to make secure not only the route to India but also the Indian Empire itself. It is true that in 1897 he did not renew the Mediterranean Agreements. The reason was not lack of interest in this region. He was ready to renew them as they stood. What he did not want was to enlarge their scope. While taking the risk of non-renewal, Salisbury had told Edward Monson, the ambassador at Paris, that Britain would continue to

act in defence of the Ottoman Empire against Russian aggression.[91] It is interesting that in February 1896, the Turkish government proposed negotiations for the conclusion of a convention on the basis of the maintenance and protection of the Sultan's rights over Egypt and the adoption of measures to secure, against all attack, the freedom of communication between Britain and India. Salisbury did not expect much benefit from re-opening the question and declined to do so on the ground that Britain's aim was not only to provide good government to the Egyptian people but also to preserve a through route to India.[92] By this time, in order to consolidate its control over Egypt, the British government was considering ways of establishing its control over the valley of the Nile.

In 1897, when the Greeks started a war against the Ottomans for the liberation of Crete, the Ottomans were able to defeat the Greeks. This dissipated the idea that the Ottoman Empire was decomposing. British public opinion was staunchly philhellene, yet the British government did not intervene militarily. After the Greeks were defeated, Britain did insist on virtual independence for Crete.[93] Thereafter, Russia became more involved in Central Asia and Britain in ways of thwarting Russia's expansion in that direction. In 1898 Kaiser William II visited Constantinople; this was symbolic of the increasing interest taken by Germany in the Near East.

Ensuring control over Egypt

During the election campaign of 1892, Gladstone had committed himself publicly to the evacuation of Egypt. On assuming office, rather than taking up the Irish question, he first drafted a memorandum on evacuation. But his colleagues in the Cabinet, including a Radical Cobdenite, John Morley, advised their chief to proceed cautiously and Gladstone accepted their advice. On this, Gordon Martel comments that they showed a readiness to abandon their principles for the sake of remaining in power.[94] But, more than any other consideration, it was the total commitment to retain control over this strategically vital area, and an awareness of this on Gladstone's part, that explain the decision to hold on to Egypt. Gladstone's administration decided not only to retain control over Egypt but also to mop up what was left of the Nile basin right up to its source.

The whole issue came up before the Cabinet when, towards the end of 1892, the new Khedive, Hilmi Pasha, tried to get rid of British administrators.[95] The Cabinet was in favour of sending British troops to Egypt to intimidate the Khedive. Gladstone opposed this proposal so apoplectically that he is reported to have commented: 'they might as well ask him to set a torch to Westminster Abbey'.[96] But British soldiers were sent to Egypt, British administrators were reinstated, and Westminster Abbey stayed where it was. With this, Britain laid at rest any doubts about Britain's determination to rule Egypt. In fact, ever since Britain had occupied Egypt, even the remote and shadowy lands up to the source of the Nile were dragged into the grand strategy involving control over Egypt, security in the Mediterranean and the route to India. Any move by any

European power in this region became classified as a threat to British interests. Threats to this region seemed to come from all directions. France seemed resolved to enter the area to restore national self-respect which, France felt, had been bruised in 1882. Towards the east of the Nile basin, Emperor Menelek of Abyssinia aspired to push the limits of his empire up to the right bank of the Nile and could seek French co-operation. Rosebery encouraged the Italians, who were trying to expand towards Abyssinia, to oppose him. In Congo, Leopold of the Belgians was dreaming of extending his empire eastwards. To establish control over the source of the Nile, the British Foreign Office wanted a tighter grip over Uganda. The problem centring on control over Uganda had been brewing for some time. Salisbury's government had refused to come to the rescue of Imperial British East Africa Company from its financial crisis, and consequently the Company had proposed to evacuate Uganda by 31 December 1892. Gladstone, Morley and Harcourt expressed themselves strongly in favour of evacuation, but Rosebery wanted to retain control. Within the Cabinet and outside, he used every card ranging from the fear of massacre of Christian missionaries, adverse effect on Britain's prestige and impact on vulnerability of Egypt to muster support for his policy. The question arises: why was Rosebery so keen to retain control over Uganda? He was not convinced by his own argument about the threat to Christian missionaries. Even economic benefits were not likely to accrue as the experience of the British East Africa Company had shown. He tried to win support by referring to benefits that could be expected in future and used the phrase 'pegging out claims for the future', which has stuck to him ever since.[97] Only the desire to save Egypt from any threat whatever and thus ensure control over the route to India can explain his insistence on retaining control over Uganda.

Rosebery found some statements of Salisbury ambiguous enough to reopen the question. In November 1892, the Cabinet agreed to conduct an inquiry. Gerald Portal, who had had long experience of working in that region, was sent for the purpose. The primary reason for choosing him was that he was likely to turn in the report that Rosebery wanted.[98] In the report, he did his duty.[99] This report came up before the Cabinet on 20 December 1893. By this time the Russian fleet had been to Toulon, and the general naval scare had begun. In this atmosphere, Rosebery received enthusiastic support. There were bitter debates in the House of Commons as a result of the decision of the Cobdenite Radicals to fight on the issue of imperialist policies, but on 20 March 1893 Labouchere, the Radical leader, moved a resolution to reduce the grant for Portal's Uganda mission; the resolution was defeated by 368 to 46 votes. A year later, a similar motion on the issue of establishing protectorate over Uganda was carried by 218 to 52 votes.[100] The overwhelming opinion in the House of Commons as well as outside was for keeping the French out of the Upper Nile basin.

In order to shut out the French, Rosebery made a treaty with Leopold of the Belgians who was expanding his power towards Equatoria and had reached Lado on the Upper Nile. It seemed better to have Leopold in this region than the French. Under an arrangement made in May 1894, the British government

agreed that it would not have any objection to expansion in Equatoria and Bahr-al-Ghazal. In return, Leopold leased to Britain a strip of territory running along the eastern border of Congo adjoining the western frontier of German East Africa. The purpose was to reopen the corridor for the Cape-to-Cairo railway, which Britain had failed to ensure in 1890. This agreement produced an explosion of annoyance in Germany and France. This made Leopold withdraw from the treaty. But the arguments over the Nile and Niger became so heated, that in March 1895, Sir Edward Grey, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office, made the announcement that any French advance into the Nile valley would be interpreted as an unfriendly act.[101] It became clear that Britain could block the expansion of France only by dealing directly with Paris.

On 1 March 1896, Italy was defeated by the Abyssinians in the Battle of Adowa. This defeat inaugurated the final stage in the partition of Africa. The Italian government appealed to Britain for help. The Kaiser advised Salisbury, who had become Prime Minister by then, to go to the rescue of the Italians, against whom the French were helping the Abyssinians. He also referred to a deep Franco-Russian plot to despoil the British Empire.[102] At first Salisbury was reticent, but within a week, he changed his mind and decided to send an expedition towards Dongola, nearly 300 kilometres south of the Egyptian frontier, under Herbert Kitchener, who was Sirdar (Commander-in-Chief) of the Egyptian army at that time.[103] The plight of the Italians was only a pretext for invasion to convince the Parliament and to maintain friendly relations with the Triple Alliance. Britain did not attach any weight to Italy's fleet, and hence desire for Italy's support could not be one of the reasons for this move.

There were other reasons for Salisbury's decision. The defeat of Italy had shown that the Abyssinians under Menelek were more formidable than expected. The Dervishes in the Sudan would be immensely strengthened if they joined victorious Menelek and received support from France. Moreover, since the Sultan of Turkey had not paid any heed to Britain's advice to stop the massacre of Armenians, it seemed important 'to make the Sultan feel at some other part of his dominions that he cannot inflict an insult upon us without suffering for it'.[104] Salisbury wanted the expedition to have the 'prestige effect' in the whole Muslim world, particularly in India.[105] Further, in 1895, the Admiralty had refused to send the Royal Navy to the straits, which amounted to an acceptance that Britain did not have the resources to assert itself at Constantinople. The corollary was that if Britain wanted to ensure control over this route to India, it should have firmer hold over Egypt. It is significant that the movement to Dongola was not in the direction of Kassala, the base of the Italians, but in the direction of Khartoum. Salisbury explained this to Cromer on 13 March, the day after the Cabinet took the decision:

> The decision…was inspired specially by a desire to help the Italians at Kassala, and to prevent the Dervishes from winning a conspicuous success which might have far-reaching results. In addition, we desired to kill two birds with one stone, and to use the same military effort to plant the foot of

> Egypt rather farther up the Nile. For this reason we preferred it to any movement from Suakin or in the direction of Kassala, because there would be no ulterior profit in these movements.[106]

The Conservative government was certain that the Parliament would jib at the expense this expedition would involve. Therefore, it asked the Caisse for permission to use the appropriated revenues. Given the diplomatic setting in Europe, Germany, Austria and Italy voted in favour of Britain, and France and Russia refused to extend support. France had already decided to advance towards the Sudan.[107] Russia did not merely support France, but calculated that the passage through Suez would help the movement of French troops to the Far East and, therefore, thought it wiser to weaken Britain's control over this region. Ultimately, France and Russia claimed that a split vote was invalid and permission was withheld. Even Egyptian money was not available. Cromer was irritated at the prospect of having the surplus of £630,000, for which he was budgeting, being frittered away in the Sudan.[108]

Kitchener, however, continued to advance and, in September 1896 Dongola was captured. The question of further advance depended on the availability of funds. Salisbury did not think that Parliament would be disposed to oblige.[109] But the concern for empire far exceeded the expectations of Salisbury. In November 1896, when the government asked the House for a grant of £800,000 to pay back the money illegally borrowed from the Caisse and to pay for the railway and gunboats, the motion was passed. Only fifty-seven members voted against the motion.[110] Clearly, no risks could be taken over the route to India. This had become all the more clear, at least to those responsible for taking decisions, when the Director of Naval Intelligence reported to the Cabinet Defence Committee: 'There would be only one way in which England could not only maintain herself in the Mediterranean at all, but continue to hold India, and that is by holding Egypt against all comers and making Alexandria a naval base.'[111] Very soon, it was being said publicly that one of the advantages of going to Dongola was that it was on the road to Khartoum.[112] To keep the pace of expedition extremely slow, Kitchener was asked to advance, but at the same time to build the railway behind him. There were reasons for this. One of these was that, as Keith Wilson has emphasised, in 1896 Salisbury was considering the possibility of partitioning the Ottoman Empire and therefore he wanted to wait.[113] Another reason was that he had planned the advance to the source of the Nile from the south as well.[114]

Soon after assuming office, Salisbury had pressed for building the railway with all speed from Mombasa towards Lake Victoria, a distance of over 1,000 kilometres. In April 1897, in strict secrecy, the government secured a grant of £35,000 from the treasury for this purpose.[115] In June 1897, Salisbury sent Major MacDonald to make his way to Fashoda from the south with some 500 men. The purpose of this military expedition was to persuade the tribes in this region to side with the British rather than with the French. MacDonald had hoped to capture Fashoda within a year, but the Sudanese garrison at Uganda

mutinied and the effort was futile.[116] Despite its failure, this effort is symbolic of the intensity of concern on the part of the British government to retain its hold over Egypt. Meanwhile, in June 1896, France had sent an expedition to Sudan under Major Marchand. According to Marchand himself, the purpose was to confront England boldly on the Upper Nile, no matter what the consequences.[117]

After the thrust from Uganda failed, Salisbury instructed Kitchener in January 1898 to make the final advance to Khartoum. Simultaneously, to isolate France, he approached Russia for a settlement suggesting 'partition of preponderance' in both China and Turkey. If Russia would recognise the British position along the Yangtse and in Egypt, Arabia and the southern reaches of the Euphrates, then Britain would respect Russian interests in northern China, the straits and the Euphrates north of Baghdad.[118] This effort proved abortive, but it might have had some effect in preventing co-operation between France and Russia during the Fashoda crisis. Salisbury decided to base his position on the right of conquest. In April 1898, Kitchener was able to defeat a large Dervish army at Atbara to the south of Berber. In June he received sanction, with an overwhelming majority in the Commons, for £750,000.[119] In September, Kitchener won a decisive victory over the Dervishes at Omdurman near Khartoum. This marked the end of the Khalifa's rule in the Sudan.

In October 1897, Salisbury had mused, 'If we ever get to Fashoda, the diplomatic crisis would be something to remember.'[120] Events proved him right. Both Kitchener and Marchand reached Fashoda on 19 September 1898. Kitchener hoisted the Egyptian flag, on which he decided to keep an eye. Marchand made it clear that he would not retire without orders from his own government. The news reached Europe on 25 September. Passions were aroused on both sides of the Channel. The British bluntly pressed for evacuation by the French. The French pleaded for delay. For two months, the two powers stood at the brink of war, seemingly over the ownership of the desert of the Upper Nile. Salisbury played his cards well. Sudan was British by right of conquest after the victory at Omdurman. He had carefully worked out the rest of the strategy relating to the route to Fashoda, hoisting of flags, future of Sudan, telegraph lines and so on. After the confrontation at Fashoda, the majority in the Cabinet led by Joseph Chamberlain did not want to think in terms of compromise. Their attitude was that if the row had come, it might as well come then as later.[121] On 28 October, war orders were signalled to the Mediterranean fleet, and the next day the Channel fleet was ordered to Gibraltar. France's naval position was much weaker. In the Mediterranean, France had fifteen battleships as against eighteen of Britain. In any case, France could not withdraw its army from the mainland because of enmity with Germany. The French had thought that Britain was bluffing. They had calculated that Britain would not take the risk of fighting on the African mainland with what the French considered to be 'second rate soldiers'. They also thought that the worldwide commercial interests of Britain would always prevent it from placing communications at risk.[122] The French were, in fact, taken aback by the virulence of reaction in Britain. On 2

November Delcassé, the French Foreign Minister, reluctantly accepted the inevitable and ordered Marchand to withdraw unconditionally.[123]

This episode during which the British government contemplated war with France over the possession of an abandoned Egyptian fort lost in the marshes of the valley of the Nile has been described as 'the most absurd' and 'bizarre' of episodes. Not only did the government adopt an intransigent stand, but it also got full support. There were moments of misgivings about the grant of money by the Commons, but, as we have seen, the House always co-operated. Nearly all the politicians and newspapers stood firmly behind the government.[124] Why was the government so intransigent? Why did it get near unanimous support? One reason put forward has been the need to assert Britain's prestige and status as a world power. Britain seemed to have climbed down in Africa and in the Far East. The general feeling was expressed by Francis Bertie: 'Unfortunately France, Russia and Germany have got it into their heads that we shall never stand up to One First Class Power, much less 2 or 3.'[125] Hence, in this crisis the government decided not to yield. But there was a more important reason: control over Sudan was considered necessary for controlling Egypt. Throughout the nineteenth century, before the cutting of the Suez Canal or after it, Britain had never made any compromise on the issue of having predominant influence over this region. While the French were pegging out claims for fulfilling an erstwhile ambition, Britain was defending what was always regarded as a vital national interest. In the Niger, where Germany had wielded the Egyptian baton to cultivate France and threaten Britain, Britain did not object to France's efforts to carve out an empire. But there was a difference between pilfering in the valley of the Niger and in trying to expand in that of the Nile. The route to India had to be defended.

South Africa

For the same reasons South Africa became the thorniest problem in Anglo-German relations in Africa. Cecil Rhodes' drive to the north, German assistance to the Boers and the future of Portuguese colonies all created blazing rows between the two countries.

As has been seen, the settlements of the early 1880s had deliberately left the relations between Britain and the two Boer Republics undefined.[126] During the decade following, two developments changed the situation. First, in 1886 gold was discovered on the Witwatersrand and almost overnight Transvaal became massively rich. Many foreigners, mainly Britons in South Africa (who became known as Uitlanders), began to pour into Transvaal seeking to make their fortunes. The other major development was that having acquired German South West Africa in 1884, Germany began to show interest in Transvaal.

The Prime Minister of the Cape Province, Cecil Rhodes, who was also the managing director of the British South Africa Company which had established control over Zambesia (officially renamed Rhodesia in 1897), tried to create a revolution against President Kruger of Transvaal by using the Uitlanders. For

this purpose, towards the end of 1895, he organised a 'raid' to the Transvaal led by his lieutenant, Dr Jameson. The plan did not succeed; Jameson was captured by the Boers and Rhodes was forced to resign as prime minister of the Cape Province. The Kaiser became so excited by the fiasco that on 3 January he sent a telegram to Kruger congratulating him on his success.

The British press reacted to this telegram in such a sharp and vitriolic manner that the German government was taken aback. This stood in sharp contrast to the much milder tone over the Congo quarrel in 1893. The reason was not just that this time a forceful imperialist like Chamberlain was the Colonial Secretary. The reason was rather that the Germans had challenged Britain's vital interest at the Cape. Even Kimberley, the Liberal Foreign Secretary, had warned Germany in December 1894 that to preserve its supremacy in South Africa, Britain would not 'recoil from the spectre of war'.[127] The reason for renewed interest in Transvaal on the part of investors, entrepreneurs and, therefore, the British government, was definitely the discovery of gold and the consequent economic prosperity in this region.[128] But strategy was also very important. A hostile, prosperous and ambitious regime devoted to nation-building, modernisation and expansion, such as Kruger's Transvaal was becoming more likely to challenge Britain's position at the Cape, over which all British governments had been so very sensitive. Germany's open support for Kruger magnified this threat. Thereafter, South Africa remained a running sore in the Anglo-German relationship.

The period following 1892 was one of unprecedented strain for Britain's strategists and diplomats. Britain's two antagonists had joined hands. This was also the period when the slightest incidents in the remotest parts of Asia and Africa – in Siam, the Pamirs, North China, the source of the Nile – became matters of intense concern. In this situation, Britain tried to be accommodating to Russia and France and to co-operate with Germany. While Russia remained hostile and France felt humbled, Germany proved exacting and troublesome. In the end, though the anxieties concerning the empire did not abate, it was saved and increased in size.

Gordon Martel has called his study of Rosebery, 'Imperial Diplomacy: Rosebery and the Failure of Foreign Policy'.[129] He looks upon Rosebery as a failure because the latter left all the European powers disgruntled. He further contends that it was this setback which convinced Rosebery that he should not seek political office again. But the basic premise on which he has based his conclusion calls for some comments. The purpose of a nation's foreign policy is to preserve the state and its status in the family of nations. While cultivation of friendly relations with neighbouring states is helpful, this cannot be viewed as the purpose *per se*. During this period, the British government did not perceive any threat to the United Kingdom. It worked to preserve the Great Power status of Britain, for which maintenance of the empire was of crucial importance. Rosebery succeeded in this respect and, therefore, it is uncharitable to dub him a failure. Salisbury continued to cultivate the Triple Alliance, but London's links

with Berlin, Vienna, Rome and Constantinople steadily became weaker. The Mediterranean Agreements lapsed. Deterioration in relations between Britain and Germany became particularly marked. Many factors contributed to this: the rise of nationalist suspicions and colonial ambitions, the talk of *weltpolitik* in Germany which amounted to proclaiming the desire to become a world power, and the decision to build a navy which created the need to stir up Anglophobia. During the second half of Salisbury's third administration, sustained efforts were made to sign an alliance with Germany while the problem of providing security to India reached an impasse. These issues are taken up in the next chapter.

6 Seeking partnerships, 1898–1902

Despite the warm glow of the Diamond Jubilee celebrations in 1897 and the triumph of Fashoda, it was not of imperial power that the Britons were most conscious of during the closing years of the nineteenth century. The evidence of Britain's decline was much more visible. What Britons noted was that their country was losing its mid-century lead in economic, colonial and naval strength, that despite the end of the economic depression, Britain's growth rate was less than that of some other countries, and that the balance of economic and military power was shifting towards Germany, Russia and the USA. Between 1880 and 1900 Britain's share of world manufacturing output declined from 22.9 per cent to 18.5 per cent, while that of Germany increased from 8.5 per cent to 14.8 per cent.[1] The resulting commercial rivalry was featured prominently in the newspapers of the two countries.[2] Besides, the Germans were embarking on *weltpolitik*, the Russians were busy overcoming the biggest handicap in overland expansion – distance – by building railways, the United States had started flexing its muscles and Japan was making confident moves. On the continent, many a cartoonist portrayed a breathless, ageing and retreating John Bull.

This is not the place to examine whether the power of Britain was actually declining or to examine the reasons thereof.[3] What is relevant here is that just as Britain's position as a leading nation had conditioned the formulation of foreign and imperial policies during the preceding decades, so did the consciousness of decline become the most critical element in determining these policies. British statesmen and strategists became more conscious of the threat the Franco-Russian combine posed to their interests, of deteriorating relations with other continental powers, of the enormity of their commitments all over the world and of the slender resources at their disposal to defend them.[4] At the decision-making level, the need to defend the Indian Empire against the sprawling Tsarist Empire was a very important constituent of this mood.

At this time many ministers, mainly Liberal Unionists – Joseph Chamberlain, Lansdowne and Hamilton[5] – began to question the policy of remaining aloof from European alliance blocs. They held that in the new realities of power politics, the assumptions on which Britain's foreign policy was based were outworn, even dangerous. They wanted to fight the battle for supremacy economically by adopting a policy of protection, and colonially by reducing Britain's commit-

ments and diplomatically by alliance with some country or other. Since it was believed that differences with Russia and France were too fundamental to be settled by any compromise, in concrete terms the ending of 'isolation' meant a British commitment to Germany or to the Triple Alliance as a whole. Chamberlain, the leader of the Liberal Unionists and the most influential member of the Cabinet at that time, proved the most vocal advocate of this course. In this context, historians have tended to attach only marginal significance to the strains imposed on policy makers by the need to ensure the defence of the Indian Empire. A study of the papers of the Cabinet, the Foreign Office, the War Office, the Committee of Imperial Defence and the private papers, however, shows that the consciousness of lack of means to guard the Raj was a decisive factor in determining the options available to the British government.[6]

Changing strategic realities

Towards the end of the century, Britain's anxieties about its ability to defend the Raj had heightened because of two developments. The first was that the traditional riposte of the Black Sea strategy was no longer available. The second was that Russia was constructing a network of railways close to the Indian frontier. At a time when it was becoming clear that Britain would have to stop Russia on the northwest of India by armed combat, the question of defending the Raj became a matter of grave concern.

Generals Wolseley and Brackenbury had been advocates of the Black Sea strategy since the 1880s. However, it was gradually becoming obvious that it would not be feasible to adopt this strategy. In discussing the reasons for the increasing non-feasibility of this strategy, personal factors have been underlined, including the internecine, sometimes malicious struggle for power and influence between the two generals, Wolseley and Roberts, and also decline in the influence of Wolseley and Brackenbury.[7] Wolseley had been the hero of Tel-el-Kebir, but after he failed to reach Khartoum in time to rescue Gordon in 1885, he lost the confidence of both the Liberals and the Conservatives. He could never exercise influence commensurate with his reputation. The command of the Indian army that he desired continued to elude him. He became Commander-in-Chief of the British army in 1895, but during the Boer War, he found that in crucial matters of intelligence, strategic planning and selection of commanders, he was sidestepped. Brackenbury served in the Intelligence Branch of the War Office until 1889. Thereafter, he was made the Military Member of the Executive Council in India. In India, where Roberts was the Commander-in-Chief, he was given an uncomfortable reception. But more important than these personal factors was the fact that the preconditions on which the Black Sea strategy was based had ceased to exist. It was a settled principle of naval warfare that in no case was the British fleet to enter the Straits unless Turkey was an ally,[8] but since the mid-1880s, this condition was not available. In 1885, at the time of the Penjdeh Crisis, on Germany's advice, the Ottomans had refused to give necessary permission to the British navy to enter the Black Sea. Moreover, with the

Russian decision to build a navy, the situation in the Black Sea had changed. Russia had also shifted the Asian supply lines from the south to a safer route north of the Caucasus range.[9] Batum had been considered a possible site for British attack, but as early as 1887 Brackenbury was reporting that it was not likely to remain vulnerable.[10] In the 1890s, as soon as signs of the Franco-Russian collaboration became visible, the strategists realised that they could not plan any offensive in the Mediterranean without first neutralising France or arranging co-operation with the central powers. Britain did not have very happy experiences of co-operating with Germany.

While Britain seemed unable to evolve any strategy of putting military pressure on Russia, Russia seemed to be consolidating its empire by building railways in a very patient and methodical manner. Neither financial strains nor difficulties of hostile terrain seemed to stand in the way. In addition to constructing the longest trans-continental railway – the Trans-Siberian Railway – between 1891 and 1903, Russia had laid a railway network in Central Asia. By 1885 a Trans-Caspian Railway had been completed to Askabad.[11] In 1888 it reached Samarkand via Merv with branches to Tashkent and into Fargana. By 1899 the rail–sea–rail route from Baku to Merv and then on to Kushk on the Afghan frontier was commenced.[12] Work on the Orenberg–Tashkent railway had begun. When completed by 1904, it was expected to link the Central Asian region directly with European Russia. These railways were often referred to as 'the sword of Damocles' suspended perpetually over Russia's opponents and as 'the real villain of the piece'.[13] The dramatic expansion of railways by Russia was watched with anxiety by British statesmen and strategists.

Russia was also making efforts to establish direct channels of communication with India. In the 1880s the government of India expressed a desire to open a consulate in some imperial city of India. Salisbury was prepared to view this proposal sympathetically. But the government of India expressed indignation.[14] It argued that there was practically no trade between Russia and India and, therefore, the consulate would not have any legitimate work to do. It also expressed the fear that the Russian government probably had some secret agents in India and that the Russian consul would become the focus of intrigue.[15] In December 1890 the heir to the Imperial Russian throne, Nikolai Alexandrovich Romanov, visited India and was received by the Governor of Bombay.[16] His visit was closely watched. In March 1900, in order to placate Russia and despite remonstrances from the government of India, a consulate of the Russian government was opened at Bombay.[17] The same year, the Society for Oriental Studies was set up in Russia under the patronage of the Court.[18] The government of India watched all such moves with utmost apprehension.

Facing Russia in superior force

While railways seemed to make Russia one vast continuous empire, the protection offered to the Indian Empire by the biggest navy in the world seemed irrelevant.[19] It was believed that with distance obliterated, Russia would be able

to move its massive army towards Afghanistan and to maintain the supply lines.[20] Besides, Russia seemed to have a vast reservoir of manpower. There were many, like Salisbury and Kimberley, who wanted to retaliate by constructing railways on the north-west of India. Salisbury pressed, as persistently as he could, for an elaborate programme of railway construction from India to Kandahar and on to Herat, from Quetta to Nushki on to Seistan and from the Persian Gulf to the inland cities and finally to Tehran.[21] Salisbury complained that it was 'the Indian neglect that afflicts me'.[22] On this, R.L. Greaves comments: 'Had these lines been completed, England could have met the enemy far from India's borders, threatened Russia's flank and interrupted her transport system.'[23] But such an argument can be described only as wishful. It does not take into account the tortuous nature of the terrain and the chronic lack of resources at Britain's disposal both in terms of manpower and finances. Such an attempt would have been unsound from a strategic point of view also. As was pointed out even at that time, it would have created continuous lines of communication from St Petersburg to Calcutta, thus making Russia's task of threatening Britain in Asia easier.[24] In this situation, the British government thought it best to rely on the Russo-Persian Convention of 1900, under which Persia had bound itself not to construct any railway nor allow any foreign power to do so.[25]

At least since the Penjdeh Crisis, it was accepted at London that massive reinforcements would be needed for the defence of India should Russia choose to use the powerful position it had attained in Central Asia. The question was considered in 1889 at a conference where representatives of both the Admiralty and the War Office were present. They laid down as a general principle that it was the duty of each subordinate government of the empire to provide, as far as its financial ability permitted, sufficient troops for its local defence. It was also accepted that it was the duty of the imperial government to see that adequate provision was made for the defence of the empire as a whole in a great war.[26] But the basic question was, from where would the reinforcements be drawn? In 1891 the Secretary of State for War, Edward Stanhope, charged the army with five missions. It had to provide 'effective support to the civil power' in the United Kingdom, to supply forces for India, to garrison all fortresses and coaling stations, to mobilise regular and auxiliary forces for the defence of the home islands and, in case of necessity, to send abroad two army corps.[27] But sending reinforcements from the regular forces meant drawing from the forces available to protect Britain against the possibility of invasion. This could have exposed the 'home' islands to sudden attack. Already there were murmurs that a disproportionate number of battalions were deployed outside Britain.[28] Sending reinforcements by withdrawing garrisons from other colonies, in particular Egypt and South Africa, could have compromised the level of defence there.[29] Even the size of the British army could not be drastically increased. The prospect of maintaining a large standing army on the home terrain was one that filled many Englishmen with suspicion. This also involved increase in expenditure and, hence, higher levels of taxation.

Subsequently, the question of the defence of India in a war with France and

Russia was never fully faced. Arnold-Forster, who became War Secretary in 1900, complained repeatedly that there was no statement of the exact purpose for which the British army existed.[30] In any case, the South African War found Britain's small professional army in the doldrums, shot through with apathy and snobbery, trailing the continental armies in size and intelligence facilities, and the Royal Navy in prestige. Defeats in South Africa further diminished the army's status. The government of India, on its part, made it clear that in view of the dangers confronting it – the consolidation of Russia's power, the huge armaments kept by the Amir of Afghanistan and the extension of its responsibilities to Burma – its army of nearly 75,000 British soldiers and 150,000 Indian soldiers was 'astonishingly small'.[31] In January 1899, George Nathaniel Curzon became the Viceroy and Governor-General of India. He had visited Central Asia in 1894 and was acknowledged as an expert in Central Asian affairs. From 1895 to 1898 he had been Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs. Both Curzon and General Roberts believed that Britain could win what they saw as the struggle for supremacy in Asia only through massive reinforcements from Britain. They wanted to convert British and colonial militias into one gigantic reserve for operations on the Indian frontier. Many politicians in Britain – Chamberlain, Brodrick and Dilke – saw the proposal to strengthen the army in India as the least controversial method of guarding Britain's imperial power, especially because it could be done at India's rather than Britain's expense.[32] But, as we shall see, this course could not be adopted because of constraints centring on the availability of financial and human resources.

The outbreak of war in South Africa brought the question of defence of the Indian Empire to the fore once again. In February 1900, some intelligence reports were received indicating that Russia had begun to advance towards the Indian frontier.[33] Immediately the government of India was asked to report on the sufficiency, or otherwise, of the forces in India in the event of a Russian attack on Afghanistan. In April 1900, the government of India communicated its views. It postulated a forward policy of occupying the Kabul–Kandahar line. For this purpose it put forward a demand for 30,000 troops at the outbreak of hostilities, with 70,000 more to follow in the event of a prolonged war.[34] This demand became the basis of a heated debate that followed. When the government of India was asked to confine itself to a scheme of a purely defensive nature, it replied that as many troops would be needed for a purely defensive strategy as for an aggressive one, if not more, and added that any policy of retreat, even though dictated by tactical considerations, could not be adopted for the Indian Empire because it was likely to affect the prestige of the Raj adversely.[35] This demand became the irreducible minimum, and all subsequent calculations were made with this as the basis.

It is notable that, at London, the Intelligence Division of the Army reached the same conclusion. In a memorandum entitled 'The Military Needs of the Empire in a War with France and Russia', E.A. Altham of the Intelligence Division of the army estimated that Russia could at any time place 50,000 to 60,000 men in Afghanistan, with countless numbers to follow, limited only by the

total number they could support.[36] An interdepartmental committee was appointed to study the Indian defence question. In its report of December 1901, it accepted that the forces based in India were clearly too small to deal by themselves with the full brunt of a concerted attack from Russia. It made suggestions for increasing India's permanent garrison by the addition of 30,000 British soldiers.[37] In the summer of 1903, Balfour informed the Viceroy that the Committee of Imperial Defence had provisionally accepted that an immediate reinforcement of 30,000 and a subsequent one of 70,000 would be necessary should Russia invade Afghanistan after completing the Orenburg–Tashkent railway.[38]

This decision came at a time when the majority in the Cabinet was aghast at the increasing cost of defence. This was the time when politicians of all hues competed to offer social services and packages of benefits to the newly enfranchised and were demanding funds for social spending. Enmeshed in the traditions of Gladstonian orthodoxy and in the Boer war, Hicks Beach, Chancellor of the Exchequer, simply refused to entertain financial proposals relating to defence. In 1901, a quarrel between him and the service chiefs nearly broke up the Cabinet. It was not that allocation for the armed forces had not increased. Between 1895–6 and 1901–2 army estimates, excluding the cost of war, had risen from £18 million to £30 million while those of the navy had increased from £19 million to £30 million. This increase exceeded that of any other European country.[39] But the margin of national safety had remained as narrow as ever. European countries were strengthening their navies, and competitors were emerging outside the continent. In view of this, the Admiralty was compelled to consider the revision of the two-power standard in favour of the less attractive criterion of 'a remarkable certainty of success in a war with France and Russia'.[40] It also undertook a worldwide reorganisation of Britain's naval forces, strengthening Britain's naval position in Europe at the expense of the Far East and the Western hemisphere.[41] By 1903 Selborne complained: 'It is a terrific task to remain the greatest naval power when naval powers are increasing in numbers and in naval strength, and at the same time, to be a military power strong enough to meet the great military power in Asia.'[42] As for the army, in October 1900, Brodrick, who had succeeded Lansdowne at the War Office, presented a scheme for six army corps stationed in Britain of which three would be ready at any time to be sent abroad. This was accepted with acclamation in the House of Commons.[43] But by early 1903 support for this scheme had collapsed, largely because it would have resulted in substantial increases in the army estimates.[44]

The Treasury tried to pass on the additional financial burden to the government of India. In a letter to the War Office written a little later, it built up its case in the following terms:

> The Indian Government requires the services of a certain number of white soldiers. The Secretary of State is compelled to obtain these soldiers through the Home Government. While an obligation thus rests upon HMG

> to meet, to the best of their ability, the requirements of India in this respect, there is a corresponding obligation upon the Indian Government to pay the whole cost of the forces supplied. So far as my Lords are aware, there has never been any undertaking to provide India with all the forces she requires at a fixed price, and they are unable to admit that she is entitled to throw upon the British Exchequer the cost of supplying her at a loss.[45]

But the government of India was not ready to buy this line of argument. It replied that a war against Russia was an imperial war since in such a war 'it cannot be doubted that not merely the credit but the very existence of the British Empire would be at stake'. It concluded that 'it would be in imperial as distinct from Indian interests that the expense would be incurred and it is, in our opinion, by the Imperial Exchequer that it should, therefore, be borne'.[46] Curzon believed that India's army fell far short of India's needs.[47] Within India, by this time, political consciousness was growing. At every session of the Indian National Congress, resolutions were passed demanding a reduction in expenditure on the armed forces.[48] The newspapers in India were already complaining that India was being dragged into imperial and international complications from which it would be free if it were not ruled by Britain.[49] Curzon pointed to the undesirability of taking the risk of arousing political discontent in India.[50]

The question was not just of finding enough financial resources for the purpose. There were other impediments in the way of increasing the size of the army in India. Since the Uprising of 1857–8, it was accepted that for maintaining the Raj, the proportion of British to Indian troops should be 1:2 for the Bengal army and 1:3 for the Madras and Bombay armies. By the end of the century, in view of the spread of nationalist feelings amongst Indians, it had become all the more important to maintain this proportion. Britain, at this time, was engaged in the prolonged and bloody war in South Africa, which had left even the British army depleted. In fact, an alarming proportion of volunteers during this war were found unfit for military duty. This created the fear that the British race was deteriorating and led to the creation of the 'Inter-Departmental Committee on Physical Deterioration'.[51] In view of all this, it did not seem possible to get the numbers that were needed for service in India.

Even if men and money were available, there were other difficulties. As early as 1889, at a joint conference of the army, Admiralty and the India Office, it was concluded that if Britain was at war with a major naval power, no reinforcements could be sent to India without strong escort 'until the British navy cleared the seas'.[52] In 1901, when this question came up again, it emerged clearly that, in view of the Franco-Russian Alliance, France would impede the transport of troops to India. Hamilton wrote:

> If we were fighting Russia alone, the task would be easy enough, but assuming at the time of the Fashoda dispute France had not given way, and we had gone to war with France, and Russia had then invaded Afghanistan,

> until the French fleet was disposed of or masked, we could not have sent out the required reinforcements.[53]

Since the navy could not guarantee the safe convoy of reinforcements, Nicholson, the Director General of Military Intelligence, proposed that the army in India be permanently strengthened by adding 15,000 British troops. But again, the government of India was not ready to bear the cost. The policy makers were thus caught in a catch-22 situation.

Hence, many grotesque schemes emerged. It was suggested that a force of 10,000 white police should be raised which would make available 30,000 troops of the 'obligatory garrisons'.[54] An interesting suggestion was made that the Gurkhas of Nepal, who were employed in great numbers in the Indian army, be counted as foreigners and Indian troops raised against them in order to maintain the requisite 1:2 ratio between foreigners and Indians.[55] It was also thought prudent to be ostentatious about whatever preparations were being made. Balfour, for example, told Brodrick that there was no reason for secrecy regarding orders which were being sent to Argentina about mules and horses: 'It is just as well that the Russians should know that we are prepared for eventualities, and though I can hardly believe that they are prepared to make war on Afghanistan, they will be less likely to do so the more they see that we are prepared to face this contingency.'[56]

There was nothing in the way of territories that Russia possessed and Britain desired. Further, Russia did not offer any points by way of targets, the capture of which could mean victory in case of war. Nor were there any areas from where Britain could apply pressure on Russia. As already said, the Black Sea strategy could not be adopted. The Baltic was not even considered a point of attack. About Port Arthur and Vladivostok, it was held that any blow there would not 'so fatally injure the Russian Empire as to force an early and advantageous conclusion of war'.[57] In this situation, E.A. Altham made a suggestion for an all out colonial war against Russia in a paper written in August 1901 entitled 'Military Needs of the Empire in a War with France and Russia'. This paper has been described as an 'epoch making' paper.[58] Altham argued that since Russia did not offer any target either to the army or to the navy, the capture of which would either lead to termination of war or at least deliver a decisive blow to Russia, the army should be used in conjunction with the navy to fight a worldwide colonial war against the weaker member of the alliance, namely, France. Control of French colonies was dependent on constant sea communication with the mother country. Interruption of this would lead to a French defeat, which would induce the excitable French democracy to upset their government. Meanwhile Britain would stand on the defensive on the northwest frontier of India and wait for Russia to be forced out of the war as a result of lack of financial help from France.[59] This was a dubious strategy based not on principles but on expediency. Needless to say, the War Office never accepted it. Still it is interesting that, faced with the inability to provide for the defence of India against Russia, an all-out war against its ally, France, was

proposed. The very fact that such suggestions were made highlights the level of anxiety on this account.

Strengthening the buffers

As already said, in case of Russia's advance towards India, the power and attitude of the rulers of Persia and Afghanistan was likely to be of decisive importance. But, at the turn of the century, relations with both the states were such that the British could not rely on their friendly co-operation. Curzon had no faith in the ability of these states to maintain their independence. He wanted to solve the problem by an aggressive display of British power and criticised Salisbury's hand-to-mouth diplomacy.[60] London was more conscious of the constraints caused by the non-availability of armed forces. Salisbury had once complained that Curzon always expected him to act as if he had five hundred thousand men at his back, and the criticism was a just one.[61]

Abdur Rahman had been the ruler of Afghanistan since the Second Afghan War. During the twenty years that followed, he had strengthened his position considerably. But in case of Russia's advance, the government of India could not be sure of his attitude. He could reject any offer of help, request help on impossible conditions, or decide to take care of himself.[62] It was believed that the Amir had 100,000 trained soldiers at his disposal. There were constant rumours that he was trying to enter into relations with Russia. Curzon's efforts to introduce railways and telegraphs into his country remained fruitless.[63] In February 1900, when Britain was engaged in bitter fighting in South Africa, Russia put forward the proposal that in view of the completion of the Trans-Caspian railway and long contiguous frontier, there should be a regular system of direct communication between Russia and Afghanistan.[64] The whole question of relations with Russia over Afghanistan was discussed in this connection. Ultimately, Russia's request was not accepted. Curzon gave expression to the general feeling: 'No reverses in South Africa, in my opinion, can possibly justify a precipitate abandonment of the whole of our Afghan policy for the last twenty years.'[65] In October 1901, Amir Abdur Rahman died. His son and successor, Habibullah Khan, ceased to reply to letters sent to him, abstained from drawing subsidy and declined several invitations to visit India.[66] The subsidy was given to the Amir to keep him 'straight and loyal'. With the Amir hostile and Russia ambitious, the situation looked grim.

In Persia, both Britain and Russia were considering the consequences of economic bankruptcy and deterioration of political authority. In his book *Persia and the Persian Question*, written before becoming the Viceroy of India, Curzon had argued that the Persian Gulf and southern Persia were areas of special concern to Britain and that all powers should be kept out of these areas, by force if necessary.[67] After becoming the Viceroy of India, he sent two despatches on the Persian question in 1899 and 1901 in which he criticised Salisbury's 'buffer policy' and suggested that the old policy of maintaining the independence and integrity of Persia be given up and Russia's 'superior inter-

ests' in the northern half be acknowledged in return for recognition of Britain's interests in the South.[68] He wanted Whitehall to designate the line in Persia beyond which the Russians would not be permitted to move without encountering British resistance. On the basis of these despatches from Curzon, Lansdowne wrote to Arthur Hardinge, the British Minister at Tehran, using Curzon's ideas and even his language. In his reply Hardinge suggested a policy of winning over Persia by some courtesies and by providing generous loans to Persia. On the latter he wrote, 'The more we get her into our debt, the greater will be our hold and our political influence over her government.'[69] In August 1902, the Shah of Persia visited London and was made a Knight of the Garter despite King Edward's reluctance.[70] But this did not produce the desired results. Hamilton complained: 'the Shah accepts the Garter and then approves finally of the new tariff without referring to us.'[71] As to the loans, financiers in London remained reluctant to respond to patriotic appeals to invest in Persia. In this situation, the Imperial Bank of Persia, British controlled but nominally a Persian institution, failed to act as a conduit for British capital.[72] Arthur Hardinge had also suggested that if Russia effected a military occupation of northern Persia, Britain should make a corresponding move in the south. This immediately raised all issues centring on military intervention. Balfour argued that if the policy advocated by Hardinge was adopted, then inland expeditions might become necessary, for which necessary resources might not be available.[73] The eventuality did arise within less than a year. In the summer of 1903, Russia threatened to intervene to suppress the popular movement in Tabriz. Hardinge warned Russia that if it intervened, Britain would move in the south and east.[74] Russia held back. To give further boost to Britain's standing in this area, Curzon was asked to make a stately tour through the Persian Gulf accompanied by an impressive naval escort.[75]

Exploring diplomatic alternatives

In the exchanges between the Prime Minister, the Foreign Office, the War Office, the Admiralty and the India Office, one constant theme was the consciousness of lack of means to defend the Indian Empire. The ominous conclusion was drawn that the result of this would be the loss of India.[76] This was seen as a death-blow to Britain's imperial position. The doctrine that in fighting for India Britain would be fighting for its imperial existence became a doctrine of astonishing persistence.[77] Even the foreign powers were aware of Britain's concern on this account. Charles Scott, the British ambassador at St Petersburg, reported that Russia was massing troops in Central Asia to prevent Britain from sending reinforcements from Asia to South Africa and also to make Britain understand that if it associated itself with Japan, things could be made unpleasant in Central Asia.[78] Similarly, in working out the 1900–01 war plan, the French General Staff calculated on Russia applying pressure in Tashkent to threaten India in the case of an Anglo-French war.[79] Money was advanced to Russia for building railways in Central Asia.

This led to a confused debate on foreign policy. Chamberlain, Hamilton and Lansdowne began to feel that Britain must either be ready to pay for a larger army, or it must have allies or friends on the continent. They wanted to solve the problem through diplomatic means. Salisbury, Hicks Beach and many Liberal Unionists believed that any radical departure in foreign policy was uncalled for. Salisbury's experiences of arriving at some settlement with Germany, France or Russia were not very pleasant. As to the Franco-Russian combine, he held that it was not based on anything like hearty goodwill or community of interests and was, therefore, not likely to last[80] But he welcomed settlements of a local nature and did not stand in the way of those who sought to improve relations with other powers in Europe.[81] Since France and Russia were rivals of long standing, in concrete terms this meant that efforts needed to be made to improve relations with Germany and the other Triple Alliance Powers. But an agreement with Russia remained the *beau ideal* of the British Cabinet. We shall see that each overture for alliance to Germany during 1898–1901 was weighed in the Russian context, and before making each diplomatic move, the possibility of reaching some settlement with Russia was explored.

The Chinese melon

The first effort to collaborate with Germany was made in China. China's defeat in the Sino-Japanese War in 1894–5 threw into question its ability to survive as a sovereign state and made way for the further penetration of European powers into China. Germany was the first to act. Taking advantage of the murder of two German missionaries, in November 1897 Germany occupied Kiaochow with its small fishing harbour at Tsingtao on the coast of Shantung. Within Germany, this step increased the Kaiser's prestige tremendously. But this exercise in *weltpolitik* had an adverse impact externally. Friendship with Russia, nurtured for so many years, came to an end almost overnight. Russia retaliated by sending its fleet to winter at Port Arthur. Germany turned to Britain for co-operation against Russia. The British Cabinet was keen to prevent Russia from installing itself at Port Arthur. Yet, Britain did not respond favourably to Germany's offer.[82] This decision has been explained in terms of the desire to prevent any attempt by the European powers to partition China. 'The maintenance of the territorial integrity of the two "dying empires", the Ottoman and the Celestial, had been the cornerstone of British policy in the Near and Far East', comments T.G. Otte.[83] It is also argued that Salisbury wanted to avoid an aggressive policy in China at a time when Kitchener was marching down the river Nile towards Khartoum.[84] But an additional reason was the desire to avoid taking an anti-Russian position. To counter any move on Britain's part, Russia could open a front on the north-west of the Indian Empire, and there Britain did not have the necessary resources to meet Russia in superior force. In the Far East, too, Britain's position was weak. In June 1895, the 'Triplice' had excluded Britain from the loan given to China. Russia had also strengthened its position. It was going ahead with the construction of the Trans-Siberian railway

and had successfully negotiated for the construction of the Chinese Eastern Railway.

Instead of co-operating with Germany against Russia, Britain first made an overture of understanding to Russia. On 17 January 1898, Salisbury telegraphed O'Connor, the ambassador at St Petersburg, to ask Serge Witte, the Russian Finance Minister, whether it was possible for Britain and Russia to work together to maintain the integrity of China because their objects were 'not antagonistic in any serious degree'.[85] A week later he expressed a readiness to extend the accord to Turkey.[86] But the proposal fell through as soon as Russia realised that the maintenance of Chinese sovereignty implied withdrawal from Port Arthur and Talienwan, situated some 80 kilometres east of Port Arthur. Witte frankly explained to O'Connor that Russia would eventually absorb the provinces of northern China.[87] Along with these overtures to Russia, Salisbury worked to secure concessions from the Chinese government for Britain in the Yangtse valley. He tried also to negotiate with the USA.

In March 1898, Germany formally obtained the lease of Kiaochow. Russia followed quickly and obtained the lease of Port Arthur and Talienwan. Russia's acquisitions caused widespread disappointment and plunged the British Cabinet into a crisis. Salisbury's gestures of an understanding with Russia were seen as prime examples of palpable weakness, both in Parliament and in the British press. But the British government refused to challenge Russia. This was a well-considered decision. Arthur Balfour, who had assumed charge of foreign affairs during Salisbury's illness, informed the Queen that after deliberating 'for more than three hours and a half', the Cabinet arrived at the decision that it was not worthwhile to risk a war with Russia in order to keep it out of Port Arthur.[88] In the House of Commons, he admitted that a strong British stand might have bluffed Russia out of Port Arthur but, 'if the bluff had been called Britain would have found herself forced into a war – a risk not worth taking'.[89] In the background was a lurking consciousness that Russia might open a front on the north-west of the Indian Empire. The British government, thereafter, decided to secure compensation for itself, the port of Weihaiwei. Chamberlain condemned the policy of obtaining 'compensation' in these areas and in the Yangtse valley which, he said, tacitly condoned Russia's actions.[90] Many circles in Britain – the China Association, the business community and many in the Cabinet and the Foreign Office – were also critical of this policy of 'grab'.[91] The business community at this time was obsessed with the assumed potential of a market of 400 million Chinese. But Whitehall decided against adopting a policy of confrontation *vis-à-vis* Russia.[92]

Alliance offers to Germany

One result of these events was that Chamberlain and his supporters in the Cabinet began to look for allies to strengthen Britain's position. They tried the Americans, who were engaged in conflict with Spain, and then the Japanese. Their principal effort was with the Germans. Chamberlain made an offer of

alliance in secret conversations with Hatzfeldt, the German ambassador at London, in March 1898 and then through public speeches.[93] Balfour supported him. Salisbury's resistance was at best feeble. It does not seem that there were apprehensions as yet in British political circles about the meaning of the naval and colonial policies being inaugurated by Bülow and Tirpitz, the Chancellor and the Chief of the Navy respectively, in Germany. At that time, Germany was only the sixth-ranking naval power in the world. There had been disputes between the two countries over Samoa, Togoland, the Cameroons and Southwest Africa, but Britain's real interest in these regions was of marginal significance. Britain's interests in the Far East were also not of such vital importance as to cause an about turn in foreign policy. It was the position of Russia in Central Asia that caused insecurity. In his sensational 'long spoon' speech at Birmingham on 13 May 1898, in which Chamberlain had criticised Salisbury's policy of isolation and had made the offer of an alliance to Germany, he had also reasoned that war with Russia could only be successfully pursued if Britain gained an alliance of a strong military power.[94] Talks between Britain and Germany continued off and on until June 1898. Ultimately, these came to nothing. One reason on the German side was that in taking the decision to build a navy in 1897, the government wanted to create 'a political power factor against England'. The German government needed to fan the anti-British tone to get the naval bills through and, at the same time, it wanted to avoid irritating Britain lest a conflict broke out before the fleet was ready.[95]

War in South Africa

Meanwhile, a crisis was brewing in South Africa. After the discovery of gold and diamonds, Transvaal seemed to be emerging as the richest spot on earth. Its growing wealth could give it a dominant influence over the rest of South Africa. Even the Cape Province seemed destined to become a mere economic dependency of the Boer Republic. The British government tried to cut off Transvaal's only outlet to the sea through the Delgoa Bay, which was a part of the Portuguese possessions. It opened negotiations with Portugal, which was passing through a financial and political crisis. But the Portuguese government did not co-operate, and the German government intervened to demand compensation. The negotiations fell through. Alfred Milner, the governor-general of the Cape Colony, also opened negotiations with President Kruger on the question of Uitlanders' right to vote, but these remained inconclusive. President Kruger declared war on 12 October 1899. But it is significant that much before that, on 6 September, Chamberlain had secured the consent of the Cabinet to what was virtually an ultimatum to the Boers. Presenting the issue before the Cabinet he had said: 'What is now at stake is the position of Britain in South Africa' and had added that 'the issue was whether, in this region, British supremacy was to be finally established and recognised, or forever abandoned'.[96] The Boers adopted guerilla tactics and fought bravely. For the British army, defeat followed defeat. During the first two months of the war the Boer armies laid siege to the

towns of Kimberley, Ladysmith and Mafeking. The British were stunned to find their country so poorly prepared. Some 50,000 soldiers were called from the colonies, including India, to fight the Boers. Two heroes – Generals Roberts and Kitchener – were sent. By the spring of 1900 the British army was able to retreve each town in turn. On 5 June 1900 Roberts entered Pretoria. With this, the war was almost over though Boer guerillas forced two further years of hard and brutal fighting. Peace was ultimately signed in May 1902. Thus, for maintaining its hold over the Cape, Britain fought a very expensive and bloody war that cost it £300 million and 30,000 lives.

When British forces were locked up in South Africa and were suffering defeats, there were persistent reports that Russia was trying to draw France and Germany into an alliance against Britain. Even in normal times, this would have been a nightmare. But at this time the prospect seemed unnerving indeed. With the Indian army depleted, the British government anxiously looked to see what use Russia would make of its pressure point in Asia. There were constant reports and rumours of Russian forces being despatched to Trans-Caspia. War Office Intelligence reports of early February 1900 indicated that during the previous two months, up to 150,000 Russian troops had been moving on Kushk.[97] As regards Afghanistan, Arthur Godley, the Under-Secretary of State for India, wrote to Curzon: 'We are expecting almost daily to hear of trouble in Afghanistan. I can hardly doubt that Russia will make a move within the next 2 or 3 weeks.'[98]

In this background, on 30 November 1899, while the Kaiser was on a visit to Windsor, Chamberlain made another alliance proposal, this time for an Anglo–German–American alliance. But Bülow remained cool towards any such suggestion. One reason was that the German government was planning to push through the Second Naval Law, virtually doubling the size of its fleet.[99] It is significant that in early 1900, when Russia opened the question of establishing direct relations with Afghanistan, both Hamilton and Godley tried to use Russia's suggestion as 'a peg on which to hang something in the shape of a general working agreement with Russia'.[100] Godley even said that if Russia's demand was to be accepted sooner or later, it was best to accept it at that stage adding: 'If we have to swallow the pill, we had better pretend to like it.'[101] This effort to improve relations with Russia also did not succeed.

In October 1900, Salisbury reorganised his Cabinet. In this reshuffle, many members who had advocated 'a new course in foreign policy' received key positions. Lansdowne moved to the Foreign Office, Brodrick to the War Office and the Earl of Selborne became the First Lord of the Admiralty. These men – as also Hamilton, who remained India Secretary – shared the alarm at the threat perceived from Russia, wanted to reduce expenditure on the armed forces and believed that Britain's anxieties could be relieved by diplomatic means. Lansdowne had been the Viceroy of India from 1888 to 1894 and then Secretary of State for War from 1895 to 1900. His 'new' approach to foreign policy has been seen in the context of the continental alliance system and the relative decline of British power.[102] But, because of the offices he had occupied,

he was in a unique position to appreciate the strategic and military impasse on the north-west of India. He showed a willingness to negotiate with any power whose help might bolster Britain's position against Russia.[103] Brodrick, as a boyhood friend and admirer of Curzon,[104] was likely to be more aware of demands for reinforcements emanating from Calcutta. Selborne held that in view of their naval position, and the demands for strengthening the army, Britain could no longer afford to regard every power as a potential enemy.[105] Hamilton was in favour of a settlement with Germany and the advantages he saw were that it would 'effectively maintain the peace of Europe' and that it would 'very greatly strengthen our position in India'.[106] He was ready even to join the Triple Alliance if need be. His support proved invaluable for Lansdowne because Curzon steadfastly criticised the policy of becoming 'entangled prematurely' in any continental alliance with a great European power.[107] In fact, on the question whether Britain could maintain its global position without giving up the policy of non-alignment, Salisbury found himself ranged on one side and the remainder of the Cabinet on the other. During 1901, his colleagues sounded out Germany, France, Japan, Russia and the USA.

At the time of the Cabinet reshuffle, negotiations were going on with Germany on China. The occasion had been provided by the Boxer Uprising there. In June 1900, some Christian missionaries had been murdered. Later, the Boxers laid siege of foreign legations in Peking. The European powers organised a joint military expedition to rescue the Europeans trapped there. Britain was preoccupied in South Africa and, therefore, participated only reluctantly. During the autumn of 1900, representatives of the European powers met in Peking to settle relations with the Manchu government. At that time, Russia made efforts to secure concessions for itself in Manchuria. This created anxiety in London. The reason was not any threat to British interests in north-east Asia; Manchuria was a remote area. Rather, Britain was concerned because this would have strengthened a country which was seen as an enemy. But the factor that caused most anxiety was that Russia and France might be able to secure Germany's co-operation. This would have resurrected the 'Triplice', a combination that Britain feared. As Chamberlain argued: 'An alliance between Germany and Russia, entailing as it would the co-operation of France, is the one thing we have to dread, and the clash of German and Russian interests, whether in China or Asia Minor, would be a guarantee of our safety.'[108]

In this situation, Britain decided once again to turn to Germany or, to use Chamberlain's blunt statement, make Germany 'throw herself across the path of Russia'.[109] Germany on its part, having inaugurated *weltpolitik*, wanted to prevent Britain and Russia from partitioning China to the exclusion of itself. At the same time, it did not want to incur the hostility of Russia on the issue of Manchuria where Germany had no direct interest. The result of all this was that Germany signed an agreement, the Anglo-German-China Agreement, on 16 October 1900 undertaking to uphold the territorial integrity of China and the Open Door. But the whole agreement was rendered innocuous by the insertion of a fluid phrase relating to freedom of all trade in China, 'as far as they can exercise

influence'. This phrase turned the agreement into what John Hay, the American Secretary of State who is associated with 'the Open Door notes', aptly described as 'a horrible practical joke on England'.[110]

The Anglo-Japanese alliance

On 3 January 1901, *The Times* reported that the local Russian and Chinese authorities had signed an agreement on Manchuria, the Alexiev–Tseng Agreement.[111] If ratified, it would have legitimised Russia's control over Manchuria. Japan took alarm over this, as any extension of Russia's influence in the vicinity of Korea was unacceptable. Japan approached Britain and suggested that together they should warn China against negotiations with any other European power, and even gave a hint that it would go to war with Russia if Britain would keep the French fleet in check.[112] During the third week of April Hayashi, the Japanese ambassador at London, proposed that Britain and Japan should endeavour to arrive at some permanent understanding for the protection of their interests in the Far East.[113] Britain's dilemma was that, without Japan, Britain would have become isolated in the Far East, while with Japan alone as an ally, Britain could not afford to take a stand against Russia anywhere.[114] Britain could not even look the other way because Japan's actions could result in the revival of the 'Triplice' of 1895, while any settlement between Japan and Russia could create a joint Russo-Japanese front. This would have extended Britain's 'isolation' to the Far East. In this situation, Lansdowne remained non-committal towards Japan while he made friendly overtures to Russia as well as to Germany.

Britain had always longed for a settlement with Russia and had made repeated efforts in that direction. In March 1901, Lansdowne made a suggestion for a direct Anglo-Russian agreement on questions relating to the railways in Manchuria and the withdrawal of Russian troops. Russia's reply, received after about a month, was 'remarkably friendly'. But the negotiations did not really get underway, and foundered over apparently minor obstacles concerning the conditions for a loan to China.[115] Another effort to reach an understanding with Russia was made during autumn when negotiations for an Anglo-Japanese Alliance were well on the way. But Lamsdorff, the Russian Foreign Minister, brusquely rejected Britain's proposal.[116]

During the spring of 1901 Britain made one more effort to secure Germany's co-operation in the Far East. But Wilhelmstrasse remained evasive. On 15 March 1901, Bülow, now the Chancellor, stated categorically in the Reichstag that in the Anglo-German agreement there was no reference to Manchuria.[117] This marked the end of Britain's efforts to co-operate with Germany in the Far East for the purpose of 'keeping a ring' for Russia and Japan. But the effort to form some agreement with Germany was not given up. Three days after Bülow's speech, Lansdowne discussed the question of an understanding of 'a more durable and extended character' directed against France and Russia with Eckardestein, who was officiating as German ambassador at that time.[118] The negotiations continued throughout the summer of

1901 with such seriousness that J.A.S. Grenville comments that the British ministers debated, 'not whether they should co-operate with Germany but upon what terms they should do so'.[119]

Towards the end of May 1901, the German government conveyed that if Britain wanted to ally itself with Germany, Germany would expect Britain to join the Triple Alliance. Bülow held that only such total commitment on the part of Britain would compensate Germany for risking a permanent estrangement from Russia.[120] It is significant that although Lansdowne had strong misgivings about assuming such wide-ranging commitments, he did not reject the German proposal at once. He instead asked Thomas Sanderson, the Permanent Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office, to prepare a draft treaty. At least two influential members of the 'Inner Cabinet' – Balfour and Hamilton – showed a readiness to accept Germany's terms. Their anxiety about the security of India was a vital consideration. It would 'enable us to reduce our expenditure both military and naval', wrote Hamilton to Curzon.[121] Balfour thought that it would give Britain worldwide security. Finally, it was Salisbury's 'masterly' memorandum which poured cold water on the proposal. He put forward three arguments: first, that the continental powers were not likely to combine against Britain when they did not do so during the South African War; second, that 'the liability of having to defend the German and Austrian frontiers against Russia' was 'heavier than having to defend the British Isles against France'; and third, that Britain's parliamentary system did not permit any British government to assume any engagement involving the *casus belli*.[122] He did not mention the problems created by Russia's pressure on India. Given Salisbury's long association with the Indian Empire, this could not be the result of oversight. One reason could be that any allusion to threaten the Indian Empire from Russia's expansion would have weakened the case against an alliance with Germany. Besides, Salisbury strongly believed that Germany would 'never stand by us against Russia' because it was 'in mortal terror on account of that long undefended frontier of hers on the Russian side'.[123]

By the middle of 1901, it was clear that Britain had been left high and dry. Only the Japanese option remained. By July, reports were reaching London that Russia and Japan were trying for reconciliation.[124] At this time, Lansdowne raised the subject of an understanding with Japan.[125] The negotiations made headway only after failure of approaches to Germany and rebuff from Russia. But, from this, it would not be proper to draw the conclusion that the Anglo-Japanese accord flowed from the failure to conclude some agreement with Germany or Russia. Reasons have to be sought in the general perception of inadequacy of resources to defend Britain's empire, which had led to the search for allies in the first place. Zara Steiner aptly comments that 'it was the Russian threat and the failure to conclude an understanding with Germany which lay behind the Anglo-Japanese Alliance'.[126] After the negotiations opened in August, many ministers began to see concrete advantages in the process. Their support stemmed from the feeling that unless the burden of defence was shared with some country, Britain would have to choose between a dangerously weak mili-

tary establishment and higher taxation. Selborne looked forward to relief from the strains imposed on the navy. The Admiralty had failed to promise safe transport of troops, if available, from Britain to India. Selborne expressed himself in favour of an alliance with Japan because in the Pacific, while the Franco-Russian combine had nine ships 'built and building', Britain had only four. An Anglo-Japanese alliance could provide a superiority of eleven to nine. He argued that this would 'add materially to the naval strength of the country all over the world'.[127]

Many members of the Cabinet – Salisbury, Balfour, Hamilton, Hicks Beach, Chamberlain and some others – had reservations about making any alliance with Japan, but they did not press their objections to the point of complete rejection of the proposal. Salisbury prepared a carefully reasoned memorandum, but it lacked fire.[128] Other members, while expressing their misgivings, added that they would accept the proposal if other members of the Cabinet were agreed upon it. George Monger says that it was these qualifications that saved the proposal.[129] It is worth noting that even those who opposed the proposal hung their arguments on the Indian question. Arguing that any alliance with either Japan or Germany would be 'useless', Balfour wrote to Lansdowne that if war should arise out of either a German or a Japanese alliance, it would have to be fought against Russia and France and the ally in one case would be Japan and in the other Germany. He added:

> A quarrel with Russia anywhere about anything means the invasion of India and if England were without allies, I doubt whether it would be possible for the French to resist joining in the fray. Our position would then be perilous.[130]

Hamilton also opposed the proposal because of its likely impact on the defence of India. He held that checked in the Far East, Russia would turn its energies to Central Asia and expressed the apprehension that, as a result of this alliance, Central Asia would see a Russian *coup* before the end of 1902.[131] Balfour, Hicks Beach and Chamberlain wanted that more strenuous efforts be made to secure the promise of help with regard to the defence of India from Japan.[132] The War Office and the India Office tried to insert a reference to Japan's co-operation in guarding Britain's interests on the frontiers of India, but Japan showed reluctance to assume responsibility outside East Asia. The British Cabinet took the decision to pursue the matter later.[133] It is significant that even the opposition, especially the Liberal Imperialists, expressed their misgivings in the Indian context. Their fear was that any alliance with Japan would render an eventual British *rapprochement* with Russia impossible.[134]

Like the British ministers, many senior leaders in Japan also were torn between their desire to negotiate with Russia and the proposal for an alliance with Britain. Ito Hirobhumi, a distinguished *Genero* and former prime minister, was in favour of a settlement with Russia. When London forwarded the draft of the treaty on 6 November 1901, no reply was received from Tokyo for five weeks,

primarily because of the absence of Ito from the country. This delay caused suspense and anxiety at London.[135] Ultimately, the Anglo-Japanese Alliance was signed on 30 January 1902. The two parties mutually recognised the independence of China and Korea. It was stated that Japan was interested 'in a peculiar degree politically as well as commercially and industrially in Korea'. It also stipulated that, to safeguard these interests, if one partner became involved in a war with another Power, the other would remain neutral. In case another power or powers intervened against the ally, the signatories would consult frankly. The alliance was to remain in force for five years.[136]

Within the Foreign Office and in the press, this alliance was seen as marking a sharp departure from the fixed policy of not having any alliances.[137] Amongst historians, there has been a prolonged debate as to whether the conclusion of this alliance marked the end of isolation or not. The problem arises mainly from the difficulty of defining what the stage of 'isolation' was. But some comments are called for. It is true that the chances of *casus foederis* arising were much fewer in the case of the Anglo-Japanese agreement, yet the British government had surrendered, without reserve, into the hands of a foreign power the decision relating to peace and war. Lansdowne admitted candidly, 'In approaching the Japanese we have indeed virtually admitted that we do not wish to continue to stand alone.'[138] The Cabinet had taken the risk with the full consciousness of the possibility of getting involved in a war not only in the Far East but of having to fight 'all over the world' in case France was called upon to join Russia on some 'obscure' issue. This marked the termination of the policy of remaining aloof from definite commitments. This alliance is often situated in the Far East alone, as an attempt to create an anti-Russian front in the Far East and as a move to counterbalance the combined naval strength of France and Russia in the Pacific.[139] In this context, it is important to remember that while any increase in Russia's power anywhere was a matter for anxiety, Britain's vital interests were not adversely affected by the expansion of Russia towards the Pacific. Hence, it would not be right to explain such an important departure from foreign policy in terms of fear of Russia's expansion towards the Pacific. It has also been argued that the motive behind signing this alliance with Japan was to concentrate British warships in home waters against the new threat from Germany.[140] But, at this stage, Britain was not in awe of Germany's naval power or its potential.[141] It was the problem of defending the Raj that formed the backdrop for the diplomatic initiatives. This was the period – the winter of 1901–2 – which saw the squabble between the India Office and the government of India about the military requirements of India, between the Admiralty and the War Office over escorting reinforcements to India, between the War Office and the Treasury over additional funds, between the Exchequer and the service chiefs over allocations to armed forces and between the British government and the government of India about sharing the burden of providing additional troops to defend India.

Towards the end of 1901, when negotiations with Japan were in full swing, Lansdowne made yet another effort for an accord with Germany. He suggested that the two countries conclude a series of small-scale agreements which would

not commit them to definite action but would declare the identity of their interests in certain areas of the world.[142] But Metternich, the new German ambassador, rejected the proposal unhesitatingly stating that it should either be 'the whole or none'.[143] This was the last time that Lansdowne proposed any alliance with Germany. At this stage it is relevant to raise the question: why did an Anglo-German alliance not happen? This question becomes additionally interesting in view of the fact that both countries viewed Russia as an antagonist and had made repeated efforts to come to some understanding. Elaborate long-term explanations have been offered such as the distrust of British democracy within the ruling establishment in Germany which made Germany insist on open military commitment ratified by Parliament, the trade rivalry, the inauguration of fleet building activity by Germany, Salisbury's impatience with methods of German diplomacy, and so on. Important as these factors are, incompatibility in the interests of the two countries *vis-à-vis* Russia has to be assigned substantial weight.

One problem in Anglo-German relations was that though their antagonists were identical, the geographical regions of their antagonisms were not. While Britain remained anxious about the security of the Raj, Germany was in mortal terror of its long contiguous frontier with Russia to its east. Since the time of Bismarck, the German government had held that a war between Britain and Russia was inevitable.[144] It believed that owing to its scattered and vulnerable possessions all over the world, Britain faced so many dangers in so many areas that it was bound to seek an alliance with Germany sooner or later. Wilhelmstrasse took the view that Germany could secure better terms by postponing a decision until Britain was more hard-pressed.[145] On the other hand, the opinion at London was that the contiguity of the frontiers of Russia and Germany and the Franco-German combine had made Germany's position 'as vulnerable as ours', and that Germany would submit to the British definition of their understanding.[146] Even the German government was extremely conscious of this. The Kaiser had commented: 'The length of [the] Russo-German frontier forces Germany to walk wearily.'[147] Another aspect of their mutual relations is also very interesting. Each remained extremely conscious that it stood to gain more by the continuance of the enmity of the other with Russia than by their mutual friendship. The Anglo-Russian setting in Central Asia served Germany's purpose because, by keeping Russia engaged in that quarter, it relieved pressure on Germany's eastern frontier and in the Balkans. Similarly, Britain stood to gain by continued antagonism between Russia and Germany because this forced Russia to keep part of its army on its eastern frontier and thus provided respite to Britain on the northwest frontier of India. All other reasons for non-fruition of efforts for alliance between Britain and Germany were subsidiary to this. A political agreement, like the army and navy, is an instrument of power. It cannot be evaluated in any context other than that of determining to what extent it would fulfil the objective for which it is designed. Far from increasing the power of either Britain or Germany, any agreement between them was likely to make their problems

more formidable. An Anglo-German accord did not happen because it was not likely to add to the strength of either country. The Anglo-Japanese alliance was likely to bolster Japan's determination to stand up to Russia and thus increase the prospect of war between these two countries. This induced Britain and France to move closer. France was no more eager to fight over Russia's interests in China than Britain was to get entangled in any war against Russia for the sake of Japan's ambitions in East Asia. Hence, both wanted to remain aloof from any Russo-Japanese conflict. Britain and France, therefore, worked for improvement of relations between them. The British had been tenaciously exploring the feasibility of an understanding with Russia. France could prove to be a conduit in that direction as well. By 1907, Britain had formed an entente with France and also an entente with Russia, a development regarded as inconceivable in Berlin. Until the summer of 1902, Britain did not have any war plan for defending Britain and the empire against Germany or the Triple Alliance. After 1907, Germany was perceived as the principal enemy. These developments form the theme of the next chapter.

7 Russia: a friend at last, 1902–7

The first half of 1902 saw the growth of optimism regarding Britain's international standing. The Boer War had drawn to a successful conclusion. There had been no continental coalition against Britain. The Hay–Pauncefote Treaty of 1901, under which Britain accepted that the United States would have the sole right to build a canal across Central America connecting the Atlantic and the Pacific, had softened relations with the United States and allowed for reduction of forces in that part of the world. Following the alliance with Japan, there was relief in the Far East as well. On the other hand, some developments were causing concern. The experience of success in South Africa had been more unnerving than exhilarating. It led to the demand for a fresh appraisal of strategic and defence policies. On the economic front, following a general recession in trade, the debate upon Britain's capacity to preserve its economic lead was acquiring more pessimistic contours. The failure of efforts to arrive at some settlement with Germany was seen as a pointer to inexorably diminishing diplomatic bargaining power.

When negotiations for an alliance were dropped in December 1901, neither Britain nor Germany thought that these would not be renewed. At that time, Russia and France were perceived as enemies while Britain did not have any plan of war directed against Germany or the Triple Alliance. But within five years, the diplomatic scene changed dramatically. By 1907, ententes were formed with France and Russia while Germany emerged as the principal enemy. When this process started, Balfour was at the helm of affairs. In July 1902, on Salisbury's retirement, he became Prime Minister. He was in awe of Russia's power and was prepared to harness all resources to defend the Indian Empire. Lansdowne remained Foreign Minister.

Historians have tended to explain this new course in British foreign policy in terms of the growing anxiety about the overall increase in the power of Germany.[1] But, in this connection, it would be well to remember that efforts to look for an associate, initiated in 1898, had been coincidental with the grave consciousness of the inadequacy of resources at Britain's disposal to defend the Raj. Repeated efforts to sign agreements with Germany did not produce positive results. The problem of the defence of India remained unresolved. The failure to befriend Germany had ended the hopes of seeing Russia entangled in Europe

as well as of taking recourse to the Black Sea strategy. The tenacious effort to evolve ways of meeting Russia in superior force on the north-west frontier of India had made British statesmen even more nervous about Russia's designs and left them aghast at the lack of human and material resources at their disposal to maintain Britain's global position. The agreements, first with Japan, then with France and then Russia, have to be viewed as fruition of the policies initiated in 1898. These moves did not flow from any desire to create any anti-German front. In the negotiations carried on with France, Paul Kennedy has not found any 'reference at all' to any general strategy of checking the Kaiser's *weltpolitik*.[2] The aims were to ease Britain's global difficulties and to find some way of remaining out of the conflict in the Far East. Germany's attitude and activities during this period were important only in so far as these augmented the general sense of inadequacy of resources.

Relations with Germany

Despite the failure of efforts to sign an alliance with Germany, the British government tried to arrange co-operation with the German government on certain specific local issues. In December 1902, the two countries co-operated in sending a debt-collecting expedition to Venezuela in South America.[3] Within a few days, Venezuelan ships were captured and a port there was bombarded. These actions caused resentment in the United States. But Germany rejected the proposal to refer this affair to the Hague. Ultimately, the matter was settled when Venezuela decided to give way to German demands. During this period there was an outburst of Germanophobic sentiments in Britain. Hamilton summed up the feeling of many in the Cabinet: 'It conclusively disposes of any idea of our being able to form or make any alliance with them for the future.'[4] George Monger traces the turn in the attitude of Chamberlain from the policy of an alliance with Germany to a policy of settlement with France and Russia from this affair.[5]

The British government's decision to co-operate with Germany on the question of the Baghdad railway produced a similar reaction. Towards the closing years of the nineteenth century, the Ottomans had decided to resume foreign borrowings. This set off the scramble for economic concessions and political influence in the Ottoman Empire. Britain secured the right to build 380 miles of tracks of the Smyrna–Aidin Railway, and Russia received a monopoly of railway construction in the provinces of Asiatic Turkey near the Black Sea and the Russian border. In 1902, the Deutsche Bank signed an agreement with the Ottomans and acquired the right to construct a railway from Haidar Pasha, situated on the Asiatic side of the Bosphorus, to the Persian Gulf. Britain had always been interested in this region. This railway was likely to reduce the time that the mail took to reach India by three days and sixteen and a half hours over the Suez route.[6] Both Balfour and Lansdowne were in favour of not taking a negative approach. The Foreign Office concurred. The feeling there was that despite doing all it could to obstruct the construction of the Suez Canal, the Canal had

been constructed. So the British government decided to take part in the new enterprise.[7] Coming soon after the Venezuelan fiasco, this news created a furore in the press. Within the government, the real opposition came from those who believed that co-operation with Germany would have adverse impact on relations with Russia.[8] The scheme sounded alarm bells also because it proposed to link the Mediterranean Sea and the Persian Gulf. The British government had never allowed any foreign power to develop a stake in the region lying on the route to India.

The efforts to co-operate with Germany, thus, did not produce positive results. During these diplomatic confrontations, bitter and public arguments amongst leaders of the two countries were conducted through the press, which fanned mutual antagonism. In the economic field, Germany was, by this time, clearly outperforming Britain. In Britain, the feeling grew that the Germans were capturing world markets by exporting at ludicrously low prices and regulating imports by protective tariffs. The years 1902–3 saw a bitter debate on tariff policy. At the Colonial Conference, which had been held at London in 1897 to coincide with the Queen's jubilee, a resolution on the subject of protective tariffs had been adopted. But at the Third Colonial Conference held five years later, the policy of imperial preference was rejected.[9] In May 1903, Chamberlain launched his attack on commercial policy based on free trade and advocated the creation of an imperial *zolleverein* and imposition of tariffs upon imports from all other countries. This movement for changes in tariff policy exacerbated distrust between Britain and Germany. Besides, the Naval Laws of 1897 and 1900 had not gone unnoticed in Britain. After the passing of the second Naval Law, Custance, the Director of Naval Intelligence, argued that since the German navy would be larger than the fleet of Russia, the strength of the British fleet would have to be calculated against the navies of France and Germany as the two next maritime powers.[10] In 1902, the British embassy at Berlin sent in a report that the German navy was 'professedly aimed at that of the greatest sea power – us'.[11] To get support for building the navy, it was necessary for the German government to carry on a propaganda campaign against Britain, which became particularly virulent during the Boer War. There was considerable discussion in German newspapers on the feasibility of a surprise attack on Britain. German leaders frequently alluded to *weltpolitik*. To the British, *weltpolitik* seemed to symbolise not just Germany's desire to become a world power but its urge to dominate. By 1902, the anxiety level had reached a stage that Selborne, who had earlier been an advocate of an Anglo-German alliance, agreed to stay on as the First Lord on the condition that the government decide to have an 'adequate' margin of battleships above the two-power standard.[12]

Meeting Russia in superior force

When prospects of any understanding with Russia or co-operation with Germany seemed as remote as ever, there were many who began to argue that rather than running after any power, Britain should adopt a tough-minded

approach to the task of meeting Russia's challenge in superior force.[13] At that time, Britain's small army was shaken by the humiliation it had faced in South Africa. Not only was there no accepted statement of the army's role, the army lacked a directing agency. In 1890, the Royal Commission under Hartington had recommended the establishment of a general staff, but no action had been taken. The Liberals, who were in power at that time, had been disinclined to create a body 'who sit apart and cogitate about war'.[14] Towards the end of 1895 the Defence Committee of the Cabinet was established, but its role was not defined. It was only in 1902 that the Committee of Imperial Defence (CID) was formed. It became the direct link between military experts and the Cabinet, and had the potential to influence defence as well as foreign policy decisions. Technically, it consisted of the Prime Minister and whosoever he chose to summon. In practice, under Balfour it was attended by the Prime Minister himself, the First Lord of the Admiralty, the War Secretary, the India Secretary, the Commander-in-Chief and the Director General of Military Intelligence.[15] In 1904, the War Office was reconstituted, and thereafter the Chief of the General Staff and Director of Military Operations replaced the last two members. In the same year, the CID got a secretariat; Sir George Clarke, who had established his reputation as an efficient defence administrator, strategist and amphibious tactician, was made its secretary. In 1905, the Foreign Secretary, the Colonial Secretary and Lord Esher, who was known as a great imperial strategist, were also made members.

What threat to British security was considered so grave as to lead to the establishment of this body? It is true that the experience of the Boer War had come as a jolt, but by 1902 this war had been won. It has also been argued that it was the fear of Germany that led to the setting up of the CID.[16] But, though a section in the Foreign Office and the Admiralty had begun to perceive danger from Germany by 1902, Germany was not yet viewed as a rival. W.J. McDermott, in a very well-argued paper, has concluded that it was the threat to the British Empire from France and Russia which led to the establishment of the CID.[17] But, as Fashoda had confirmed, France by itself was not in a position to offer any challenge to Britain. It was the combination of the two which had become a matter of concern. The contingency that the British strategists feared the most was a war with Russia in Central Asia in which France could obstruct the sending of reinforcements from Britain, or a Russian invasion of India in case of complications in Europe. Given the growing concern at the lack of means to meet Russia in superior force in Central Asia, an empirical investigation of the actual problems involved in Indian defence and the need to co-ordinate foreign policy with actual military power seem to have been decisive considerations in the formation of the Committee of Imperial Defence.

The Committee of Imperial Defence concentrated a greater part of its attention upon a Russian assault. Of the eighty-two meetings held during Balfour's tenure as Prime Minister, forty-three were devoted almost entirely to the vexed problem of safeguarding the Indian Empire. Some seventy-five papers were placed before the Committee on this question. The word 'inordinate' has often

been used to refer to the amount of time devoted to this issue.[18] This, in fact, is an indication of the centrality of the concern for India on the part of Balfour and his government. The Admiralty tended to remain aloof from the proceedings of the CID.[19] The reason for this was that the primacy of the Admiralty's role or the maritime strategy was never questioned; hence it did not feel the need to discuss this issue. Though called the Committee of Imperial Defence, the CID was a British rather than an imperial body. It was left up to the Dominions to decide what use they wished to make of it. In fact, they asked no questions and sent no delegates to it, although a Canadian minister once attended a meeting while in London on other business.[20]

The first issue that the CID took up in its first meeting on 12 December 1902 was that of the defence of India.[21] In the early exchanges, the War Office and the government of India agreed on one fundamental issue, that it was difficult to defend India from its existing frontier. They accepted that the occupation of the Kabul–Kandahar line offered a better opportunity to limit Russia's freedom of action with an attractive economy of force.[22] This brought the question of the vulnerability of either end of this line to the fore. No danger was seen from the northwest side of this line where, it was felt, the British garrisons at Chitral and Gilgit would bar Russia's advance. But on the southwest, Seistan in the southeast of Persia seemed to be the area from where Kandahar could be invaded.

Early in 1904, information began to reach London that the construction of the remaining 380 kilometres of the Orenberg–Tashkent railway was being pushed forward with feverish haste.[23] It was received with anxious concern at the War Office and the India Office. When the matter came before the CID, Brodrick, then India Secretary, reminded the members that in July 1903 Balfour had pledged to send 30,000 soldiers to India in case of Russia's invasion, with 70,000 to follow.[24] Lord Roberts, who had been the commander-in-chief in India and was at this time the commander-in-chief of all British forces, demurred, stating that because of various deficiencies the War Office could provide only 48,000 troops.[25] Arnold-Forster, the War Secretary, and the strong delegation from the War Office comprising of Neville Lyttelton, Chief of General Staff in Britain, James Grierson, the Director of Military Operations, and C.W. Douglas, the Adjutant-General, pointed out that if 100,000 troops went to India, 'there will be no troops left for any other imperial purpose'.[26] But the CID preferred to accept the advice from the India Office and the General Staff and remained committed to sending 52,000 non-existent soldiers to India in case of war with Russia.[27] Non-acceptance of the 100,000 figure would have been tantamount to admitting that Britain did not have the resources to defend its Indian Empire. Curzon had indeed said that 'the only alternative we can see is that Britain must remain without the means of defending the Indian Empire'.[28]

Subsequently, the estimates of the number of troops that Russia could deliver on the Afghan frontier as also the military bill of the government of India continued to increase.[29] During the spring of 1904 the results of the 'Kriegspiel' organised at Simla during the previous summer by Kitchener, the hero of Sudan

and South Africa and, since 1902, the commander-in-chief of the Indian army, to test various invasion scenarios reached London. By November, Indian demands for reinforcements had risen to 158,000 men.[30] Such was the intensity of concern for the defence of India that Kitchener prepared a scheme for the complete overhaul of the entire British Indian army which, he thought, was organised 'solely for the preservation of internal order without thought of external aggression'.[31] He proposed reducing the 'obligatory garrison' stationed throughout India so as to double the number of divisions available for war on the northwest. This aim was to be accomplished in five years.[32]

By 1904, the problem of defence of the Indian Empire had reached such alarming proportions that the British government was called upon to lock up all its troops in the defence of the Indian Empire, leaving even the British Isles undefended. The consciousness of its inability to supply manpower for the defence of India was a constant theme in the deliberations of the CID. There seemed reason to believe that war with Russia would strip the Empire of all its readily available forces. It was clear that Britain would have to find some means of putting muscle into the strategy of defending India. Many in Britain began to feel that the requisite number of troops could be made available only by imposition of some form of conscription. But the proposal was not accepted, because it was believed that the political cost of conscription would be very high. Roberts, the nation's most popular soldier, became so convinced of the need for conscription that he resigned from the CID to create opinion in the country in favour of conscription. By 1902, many in the Conservative government tended to accept that the only solution to their military difficulties was recourse to some form of compulsory military service.[33]

As they looked more closely at a possible campaign, War Office analysts became increasingly aware of the peculiar difficulties of war in this remote mountainous region of Central Asia. One problem was that of ferrying the available troops to India as soon as possible because Russia's ally, France, was likely to hamper the transportation of troops to India. The War Office was not ready to take the risk of delaying reinforcements. In a paper it pointed out: 'Such a delay as this might be fatal to our Indian Empire, it would certainly be fatal to our prestige. Sacrifices must be made and risks must be run to avoid such a disastrous contingency'.[34] To overcome this problem, it was suggested that between 10,000 and 15,000 troops be maintained in South Africa which could be despatched across the Arabian Sea in the event of an emergency.[35] The scheme foundered on the issue of arranging funds for the purpose. The War Office even contemplated hiring its own ships to send in convoyed troops to India and, if necessary, enlarging its transport department to enable it to undertake this operation,[36] and worked out its own transport routes. Then there was the problem of transporting troops from the railheads to the theatre of war, if and when they became available, and of sustaining them there. One War Office memorandum noted that only 10,000 men could sustain themselves for a year at Kabul without external supplies.[37] Calculations were made regarding the number of camels needed for the purpose and the amount of fodder needed for them. Clarke

calculated that to feed five divisions in Kabul, thirty-one days' journey would be needed requiring 23,479 camels excluding any allowance for animal fodder.[38] All these schemes died without getting very far from committee meetings, but they are indicative of mounting anxieties at the policy-making level.

In this situation, many interesting suggestions emanated from Calcutta as well as London which highlight the desperation of the policy makers. Curzon suggested that Britain should obtain a lease of the area near River Helmund in Seistan and develop its resources through dams and an irrigation network. He estimated that this would fetch a revenue of £330,000 a year. But he envisaged it primarily as 'a valuable adjunct of diplomacy'. His argument was that this would give Britain the power of ruining Seistan at pleasure if British wishes were not complied with or in the event of Persia siding with Russia.[39] But Balfour did not accept this 'thunderbolt' from Curzon. He believed such a power over the destiny of Seistan could never be exercised. 'Would it be possible to starve the peasants in Seistan because a corrupt government at Tehran had appointed a Governor to whom we objected?' he asked, and added: 'There are some punishments so severe that they never can be administered'.[40] In London, it was suggested that Russia's poverty be exploited by attacking France's colonial empire with the hope that if France 'could be detached [from Russia], the financial position of Russia would make it extremely difficult for her to continue the war alone'.[41]

The task seemed daunting because of financial implications. After the Boer War, the cost of serving the national debt had risen by more than 50 per cent. C.T. Richie, the Chancellor of the Exchequer during 1902–3, warned that unless the rate of increase in government spending was reduced, it would not be possible to maintain politically acceptable levels of taxation. He was particularly keen to reduce expenditure on defence.[42] The government remained torn between the desire to achieve economies and to provide for the defence of India. Under pressure from the Prime Minister and the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Arnold-Foster produced a bewildering series of schemes for army reform. The motive in each case was to reduce manpower and, thereby, costs. Each, in turn, foundered on political objections or resistance from within the military establishment. Proposals to eliminate the home defence militia were vetoed in Parliament, less for sentimental reasons and more because these seemed to leave the United Kingdom unprepared for the eventuality of invasion. Suggestions were put forward for creating a two-tiered system with short enlistment overseas, which were opposed by the General Staff as disruptive and inefficient.[43] So strong was the desire to augment the armed strength and, at the same time, to achieve economies that in January 1905 Arnold-Foster requested that a joint committee be established to consider the proposition. 'Given that the country cannot afford to pay more than 25 millions a year for the Army, how can that money best be spent upon the maintenance of a force capable of supplying the military needs of the Empire?'[44] Balfour did appoint a small committee to investigate, but nothing could be done before Balfour was forced out of office.

Afghanistan, Persia and Tibet

While the Committee of Imperial Defence was trying to grapple with the staggering problems of distance, terrain and resources, the government of India tried to strengthen its influence in the states that lay on Russia's route to the empire: Afghanistan, Persia and, during this period, even Tibet. To make Afghanistan a stronger barrier, Curzon proposed that the Amir be persuaded to introduce railways and telegraphs in his country and define the status of the British representative at Kabul. He warned that unless this was done, the subsidy and passage of arms and armaments through British territories should be denied to him.[45] For this purpose, the government of India wanted to send a mission to Kabul. It required a good deal of effort on Curzon's part to make the Cabinet accept the proposal.[46] In December 1904, a mission was sent under L.W. Dane, Secretary to the government of India in the Foreign Department. The Amir tried to confine the negotiations to the question of repelling a Russian attack. He argued that since he had observed all his father's pledges, he was entitled to all the privileges his father had enjoyed. He also hinted that he could get arms and ammunition from elsewhere. By this time, the news of Russia's defeat in the war against Japan had reached Kabul and had generated confidence there. The government of India was in favour of forcing the Amir to sign a treaty on British terms, but it was 'ordered' by the Cabinet to accept the Amir's terms.[47] Finally, in spite of strong remonstrances from the Viceroy, Dane was asked to sign a treaty renewing earlier arrangements. London was satisfied. Brodrick held that it was not a bad stroke of policy to have got something which could be taken away in the case of serious complaint.[48] After this mission, the relations between the Amir and the British became, if anything, worse. The Amir did not send all the letters he received from the Russians to the government of India, as he had done earlier. In Persia, Russia continued to strengthen its position despite defeat in the Far East and the revolution of 1905. There were reports that it had acquired a shipping line in the Persian Gulf and had appointed a consul at Bandar Abbas.[49] London merely watched. As Grey explained to Spring-Rice, Britain was not really in a position to support Persia militarily against Russian advances.[50]

During this period, an effort was made to turn the land-locked state of Tibet on the north of India into a buffer against any thrust by Russia from that direction. The military strength of the Tibetans themselves was, as the government of India commented, 'beneath contempt'.[51] Unlike in Afghanistan, the British here were on a stronger geo-political terrain because Russia was separated from Lhasa by some 1,800 kilometres of desert. Therefore, as Balfour wrote to the King, Russia had 'no chance of competing with us'.[52] During Curzon's period, 'rumours of a very persistent kind' were reaching Calcutta that the Tsar had been in contact with the Dalai Lama through a certain Dorjieff for some years. Curzon thereupon suggested that a mission with a large military escort be sent to Tibet with the aim of establishing direct British influence there to the exclusion of that of Russia.[53] Ultimately, in the summer of 1903 a mission with a military escort was sent under Colonel Younghusband. Historians tend to create the

impression that it was an imperious Curzon who dragged an unwilling Cabinet into granting permission for the expedition,[54] but the matter was discussed at length in a meeting of the Cabinet held on 19 February 1903. The ministers did express their apprehensions forcefully to the effect that a 'friendly' mission 'with rifles and bayonets' would end in the establishment of some form of protectorate over Tibet. Yet they did not reject the proposal; after expressing their apprehensions, the ministers gave approval. Ultimately, the Cabinet accepted that it would be 'highly inexpedient, indeed disastrous' to permit the Russians to attain a commanding or exclusive position at Lhasa.[55] Younghusband waited at Khambajong from July to December 1903. The Tibetans did not come forward to negotiate. He was asked to go ahead, and in August 1904 Lhasa was occupied virtually without any opposition. The Dalai Lama fled with his entourage to Mongolia. A treaty was signed between the governments of India and Tibet, which provided for the occupation of a part of Tibet – the Chumbi valley – for seventy-five years. But the government at London commanded the government of India to revise the treaty. Even the revised treaty, however, enabled the British to establish a British Trade Agent at Gyantse, to impose an indemnity, to occupy the Chumbi valley for three years (or until the indemnity was paid) and to make the Tibet government promise that it would not give concessions to any other power.[56]

The aggressive display of British power in Afghanistan and Tibet thus succeeded only in convincing the Cabinet that the problem posed by Russia could not be solved locally on Calcutta's initiative. It once again explored the possibility of some settlement with Russia. In the meeting held on 19 February 1903, in which sanction was given for the expedition to Tibet, the ministers also asked Lansdowne to see whether some *modus vivendi* could not be arrived at which would diminish 'this perpetual friction in Central Asia'.[57] When Russia did not give any positive response, the British government tried to put pressure on Russia by adopting a minatory posture. It gave permission to the British expedition, which was waiting at Khambajong to proceed to Gyantse, halfway to Lhasa. It also decided to buy two battleships that the government of Chile wanted to sell so as to deny them to the Russians. Lansdowne told Cromer: 'I do not, however, at all regret that we should have succeeded in irritating them and I feel sure that we shall not thereby have at all diminished the prospects of an agreement'.[58]

These tactics did have some effect. In November 1903, Count Benckendorff, the Russian ambassador at London, told Lansdowne that Lamsdorff wanted to remove all sources of misunderstanding between Britain and Russia in Persia, China and Afghanistan.[59] 'What had proved unattainable in 1898 and 1901 became a possibility in 1903', comments Zara Steiner.[60] Lansdowne continued the negotiations with Russia with the full backing of the Cabinet. On 1 January 1904, he circulated a draft of an agreement with Russia on various matters duly signed by the Prime Minister. But matters could not proceed any further, because relations between Russia and Japan had reached a breaking point.

The Anglo-French entente

By the summer of 1903, many ministers in London began to favour an understanding with France. The origins of this feeling have to be traced not to the disillusionment resulting from efforts to befriend Germany or Russia but to the factors that led to the hunt for allies in the first place. The strategic dilemma centring on the inadequacy of resources to defend the Indian Empire against Russia's expansionist moves had remained unresolved. The efforts to create a strong anti-Russian front by befriending Germany had remained futile, while Russia had not responded to calls to settle the points of dispute. Most ministers, particularly the Foreign Minister and the India Minister, looked upon the settlement with France as a stepping stone to a better understanding with Russia.[61] On Lansdowne's attitude, Paul Kennedy aptly comments: 'If Lansdowne was eager to improve relations with any power in this period, then it was with Russia – for imperial defence considerations – and not with France, which (however useful a colonial partner) threatened to drag Britain willy-nilly into continental power-politics'.[62] Hamilton, the India Secretary, was as keen for a settlement with Russia. He wrote to Curzon in January 1903: 'Time is on Russia's side; the longer we delay coming to an arrangement, the worse the settlement for us will be'.[63] The desire to come to a settlement with Russia was an important reason that made London turn to Paris.

Two Frenchmen who played the most important role in bringing France and Britain together were M. Delcassé, the French Foreign Minister, and Paul Cambon, the French Ambassador at London. Both became known as Anglophiles and both occupied their positions in 1898, the year of the Fashoda Crisis. But the process of improvement did not begin immediately after Fashoda. The issues of conflict between Britain and France in West Africa and the Sudan had been settled in 1898 and 1899 respectively, but the resentments had not dissipated even four years later. To many Frenchmen, these settlements represented diplomatic defeats. During the Boer War, the French press had been more vitriolic than the German. Politically, in France this period was marked by frequent change of governments and, in the political alignments that emerged, the colonial group occupied a decisive position. It stood to gain politically by taking an anti-British position. At the same time French colonialists began to dream of controlling Morocco, which was seen as the only missing link in the French Empire stretching from equatorial Africa to Tunisia. In 1880 a treaty had been signed under which European powers had acquired many rights in Morocco. Delcassé decided to make efforts to obtain recognition of France's special interests in this region by the countries involved. In 1900 he was able to secure Italy's consent. In the summer of 1901 he approached Germany. Relations between the two countries had become worse since the Fashoda Crisis, when Germany had watched France's discomfiture with apparent glee. At the time of the Boer War, Kaiser William II had suggested the formation of a Continental League against Britain, and the French government was taken aback when the German government clarified that this would imply acceptance by France of the permanent loss of Alsace and Lorraine. When Delcassé

opened negotiations with Germany over Morocco in June 1901, the Germans made it clear that the price of their co-operation would be exactly the same as before.[64] This was the time when the Conservative government in Britain was under attack for co-operating with Germany in Venezuela and on the Baghdad railway issue, and the question of defending the Indian Empire was being feverishly discussed. Hence Lansdowne decided to co-operate with France. In the spring of 1903 he admitted the possibility of accepting French preponderance in Morocco. At that time it was not perceived as a step preliminary to an entente, but a feeling began emerging that an improvement in relations with France could facilitate improvement in relations with Russia. Even Cromer at Cairo used the Russian card. Advocating an understanding with France, he wrote to Lansdowne in early October that it 'may prepare the ground for some reduction in our enormous military and naval expenditure'.[65] The efforts to improve relations with France were likely to get support from the other side of the House also. The Liberals and the Radicals had always been in favour of befriending France.

Around this time, the business community also showed keenness for improving relations with France. In 1900 the famous banker, Sir Thomas Barclay, arranged a visit of the British Chamber of Commerce to Paris. The French Chamber paid a return visit. The two countries also agreed to refer the disputes between them to the Hague Arbitration Tribunal.[66] In May 1903, King Edward VII paid an official visit to Paris and President Loubet visited London in early July. These visits did generate goodwill. Delcassé had accompanied the President, and some preliminary discussions about an agreement did take place, but relations between the two countries remained uncertain.

By this time it was apparent that in the Far East, Russia and Japan were heading towards a confrontation. Russia was refusing to evacuate Manchuria in violation of the schedule agreed upon between the two countries in April 1902.[67] This had made the Japanese truculent. On 27 April 1903, the Japanese minister of marine asked Britain to reinforce its squadron in the Pacific. On 3 July 1903, Hayashi announced that Japan would approach Russia for a direct settlement of differences between the two countries in Korea and Manchuria. He also invited Britain, under the terms of the Anglo-Japanese alliance, to discuss matters of common interest placed in jeopardy by Russia.[68] It was the prospect of getting involved in a war in the Far East which provided the vital spur to negotiations between Britain and France. None of the countries could act as a neutral. The specific terms of both the Franco-Russian and the Anglo-Japanese alliances provided that each signatory would remain benevolently neutral if only one country was involved, but would fight if its partner was opposed by two or more powers. In 1902, Britain had taken the risk with full consciousness of its consequences. At the same time, Britain wanted to ward off the 'appalling calamity' of having to join the war.[69] As soon as the prospect of war between Russia and Japan appeared on the horizon, negotiations started. Conversations between Lansdowne and Cambon began on 29 July and were carried on tenaciously. There was hard bargaining

on certain colonial issues. But whenever the pace of negotiations flagged, the prospect of having to join in the war encouraged them to carry on. On 8 February 1904, Japan attacked the Russian fleet at Port Arthur and the Russo-Japanese war started. Thereafter, negotiations acquired a greater momentum and in two months' time, on 8 April 1904, the Anglo-French entente was concluded.

The Anglo-French entente was not an Anglo-Japanese style alliance involving mutual assistance in time of war or any commitment for support in Europe. It merely settled various irritating disputes in different parts of the world, in Egypt, Morocco, West Africa, Siam, the New Hebrides and the fisheries off Newfoundland.[70] The most important provisions related to Egypt and Morocco. In Egypt, the French government agreed that it would not obstruct the action of Britain by insisting 'that a date should be fixed for the British evacuation or in any other manner'. Britain also obtained a waiver of the financial restrictions. With this, Egypt ceased to be a vulnerable point in British diplomacy. Britain recognised French predominance in Morocco. The 'Secret Articles' contemplated the partition of Morocco between France and Spain, Spain getting the northern coastal strip and France the vast hinterland.

Britain and the Russo-Japanese War

In the war between Japan and Russia, a defeat for Japan was universally expected. What attitude should Britain take? This was the crucial question before the British statesmen. Should Britain restrain Japan? Should Britain let the two countries fight? Both these views emerged at London. What is interesting is that both sides weighed the issue in the context of the effects of their policies on the security of the Indian Empire.[71] Lansdowne abhorred the prospect of war. He was in favour of telling the Japanese distinctly that they should accept the best bargain they could get. He told Austen Chamberlain: 'If we throw in our lot with Japan that will mean war with Russia all over the world and we have no longer to consider the local conditions in the Far East'.[72] It was the apprehension that an exultant Russia could strike at the British Empire whenever it pleased through Afghanistan, and that Britain could not hit back at any point, that lay behind the fear of getting involved.

Balfour, on the other hand, believed that Russia's involvement in the war would drain it of its resources and, therefore, Britain would gain by such a combat, irrespective of whether Russia won or lost. He discussed the question at length with Francis Knollys, the private secretary to King Edward VII, who reported to the King:

> Russia, even if successful, would be greatly weakened, she would have created in the Far East an impregnable and un-sleeping enemy. She would be under permanent obligation of keeping in these distant regions an army and a fleet, which would be most burdensome to her finances. And Mr.

> Balfour concludes from all this that she would be much easier to deal with, both in Asia and in Europe, than she is at present.[73]

Balfour also believed that even if successful, Russia could at best occupy Korea. For various reasons other ministers and members of the CID – Selborne, Chamberlain, Arnold-Foster, Altham and Nicholson – agreed with Balfour.[74] The King was inclined to support Lansdowne, but Balfour was able to convert the King to his views.[75] Ultimately, despite apprehensions of getting involved in the war, the British government did nothing to restrain Japan. Lansdowne was advised to continue efforts in progress to conclude an agreement of a general nature with France.[76]

While the war was ongoing, there was no question of signing any alliance with Japan's enemy, Russia, but the British government did not lose sight of the ultimate objective. It tried to do what it could, to soften relations with Russia. The reasons have been stated succinctly by Spring-Rice:

> Germany will no doubt try to persuade Russia that France has been bought off by England and that its ally was deserting it. Germany would, of course, offer to take the vacant place. But what we can do is to avoid justifying any aggressive action on the part of Japan, and doing her such acts of courtesy as prove our goodwill – so far as it does not imply a breach of faith to Japan … The next step should be no doubt to use the French arrangement as a stepping stone to some sort of improvement in our relations with Russia.[77]

Britain did not respond favourably to Japan's efforts to obtain some tangible sign of British sympathy. It took the view that the Alliance did not apply to a war between Japan and Russia alone.[78] The British government followed a policy of restraint in its dealings with Russia even in the face of provocation.[79] It removed the China Station fleet from Wei-hai-wei so as to avoid possible incidents. It restrained the government of India from adopting a confrontationist posture at Kabul and Lhasa. Meanwhile, on the war front, to the surprise of many, the opening battles showed that Japan was more than a match for its Occidental opponent.

On 22 October 1904, a close encounter of a bellicose kind took place at Dogger Bank in the North Sea, when the Russian Baltic fleet heading for the Far East sank some British fishing boats believing them to be disguised Japanese torpedo boats. There was uproar in the British press and a demand for revenge.[80] For the first time since Penjdeh in 1885, the British government considered the possibility of war. It accepted the government of India's demand for 150,000 men, knowing that soldiers in such a number were simply not available. The War Office hastened to inform the government of India that it would send the reinforcements needed and made inquiries about the details of their composition, the interval between their arrival and so on. Selborne enjoined the First Sea Lord to prepare an Admiralty study of the naval means of coercing Russia.[81] This was also the time when in India the dispute between

Kitchener and Curzon on the question of authority over expenditure on the army had reached a most delicate stage. Balfour requested Curzon not to press his objections to Kitchener's scheme. The reasons he gave show his intensity of concern:

> But if no commission be appointed to consider the military organisation in relation to the changed circumstances of India, if Kitchener thereupon resigns and if, to crown all, we become involved in serious hostilities with Russia, I believe that both at home and in India an impossible situation would be created.[82]

The world's 'top nation' could not concede that it did not have the resources to defend its empire. On his part, Delcassé strove feverishly to mediate between London and St Petersburg. Ultimately, Britain agreed to demand only an inquiry into the affair and punishment for those responsible for the shooting.

Japan was able to defeat Russia on sea and land. On 2 January 1905, Japan occupied Port Arthur at a heavy cost. Defeat abroad compounded internal unrest in Russia, which burst forth into an open revolt on 22 January 1905. In May 1905, the Russian Baltic fleet of fourteen battleships and five armoured cruisers was annihilated at Tsushima. Thereafter Russia sued for peace. The Treaty of Portsmouth was signed between the two countries on 5 September 1905. During the war, Britain had not made any effort to bring the hostilities to an early end. The editors of *The British Documents on the Origins of the War* devote a section to 'the British Contribution to the Mediation of President Roosevelt'.[83] This tends to give the impression that because of its special position under the alliance, Britain played an important role in mediating between the two belligerents, but this impression is erroneous. The question of ensuring the security of India had reached such an impasse that members of the Cabinet came to agree that their interests would be served better by continuance of the war until Russia became too exhausted to embark upon expansionist ventures on the north-west frontier of India.[84] When it became obvious that Japan was doing very well, Brodrick wrote to Ampthill, the acting Governor-General of India, that 'another six or nine months may exhaust Russia to a degree which will render her innocuous for many years to come'.[85] After Port Arthur fell in January, Balfour wrote: 'From a narrowly national point of view, the balance of advantages, I suspect, is on the side of continued hostilities'.[86] On the effect of Russia's defeat on the security of the Indian Empire, there were two views. Clarke believed that after the mauling Russia had taken in the Far East, Russia would not think of following an expansionist policy. But the general feeling was that Russia would try to retrieve its lost prestige, both internally and internationally, by some aggressive move towards India. The government of India, Charles Hardinge at St Petersburg and Claud MacDonald at Tokyo shared this view.[87]

At this stage, the Conservative government decided to renew the Anglo-Japanese alliance. This alliance was to last for five years. But Balfour took up this question in 1905 itself, mainly for two reasons. First, a change of government was

likely and he did not want the next government to give up a policy the success of which had been a matter of pride for his party. Second, he saw in this alliance an opportunity to make Japan share the burden of defending the Indian Empire. A meeting of the CID was held on 12 April 1905 at which questions relating to the defence of India and the proposal to renew the alliance with Japan were taken up. At the time of the Dogger Bank 'incident', the promise to send a reinforcement of 150,000 soldiers to India had been reiterated and the feeling had remained that so many men could not just be spared. An appropriate amendment of the Anglo-Japanese alliance offered a way out of this dilemma.[88] It had other advantages as well. C.L. Ottley, the Director of Naval Intelligence, pointed out that provision for troops from Japan would reinforce the Indian army 'in as many weeks as a numerically equal army from home would take months'.[89] In a note on the 'Future Relations of Great Britain and Japan', G.S. Clarke argued that a simple revision of the Anglo-Japanese alliance was of no use to Britain. He added:

> In return for the great weight of naval protection accorded to Japan, she should undertake to supply (say) 150,000 troops for the defence of our Indian frontier…The fact that a large Japanese contingent would be supplied in the event of our Indian frontier being threatened would amply suffice to put an end to Russian projects in that direction – if they exist.[90]

The revised draft worked out by the British Cabinet provided for two major changes. One was that the treaty was to operate in case of attack by a single power. In other words, it was to come into operation in the case of attack by Russia alone. Secondly, it provided for military help from Japan on the northwest frontier of India if the security of India was imperilled in that quarter. The first change amounted to a concession to Japan. But this concession was given as bait to Japan to extend the scope of the alliance to India.[91]

Not only did the Balfour government undertake strenuous efforts to make Japan commit itself to sending a large force to India, it delayed the renewal of the treaty until the Japanese agreed to extend its scope to cover the adjacent regions. Balfour defined these as 'Afghanistan, the strip of Persian territory adjoining Afghanistan and Baluchistan, or if the last is too large, then Seistan alone, or possibly Tibet'.[92] The Japanese resisted. The Japanese ambassador pointed out that if the terms Britain wished to employ were adopted, Japan would henceforth be obliged to organise its military forces in times of peace so as to provide, in times of war, a suitable force for service in India.[93] Ultimately, the decision was postponed. The Anglo-Japanese Treaty was renewed on 12 March 1905, providing that a conference would be convened to discuss the issue of assistance from Japan for the defence of India.

The Moroccan crisis and Anglo-French 'conversations'

While negotiations for the Anglo-French entente were ongoing, the German Foreign Office maintained a low profile. But it could not remain indifferent.

From the German point of view mere settlement of overseas quarrels between the two countries was of significance for it deprived Germany of the chance of adopting the Bismarckian device of extracting a pound of flesh for itself. Further, mere joining together of the two Mediterranean powers was likely to make Italy reconsider its membership of the Triple Alliance and thus it threatened to break up the Alliance. But, above all, it was the fact that Lansdowne and Delcassé had taken care to buy off other powers, but not Germany, that hurt. This was interpreted as a deliberate attempt to snub Germany. Germany first turned to Britain for 'compensation' for changes in the status of Egypt. Bargaining continued until June 1904. Later, Germany decided to mount a direct challenge to the Anglo-French entente on the question of Morocco. Germany's case was strong. It had been a party to the agreement of 1880 guaranteeing full commercial freedom in Morocco. In 1904–5 Germany could claim to be defending the Open Door.

In January, France sent a deputation to Morocco to negotiate with the Sultan. In March, Wilhemstrasse arranged a tour by Kaiser William II to Tangier, a Moroccan port on the Atlantic. The Kaiser landed there on 31 March and publicly proclaimed his belief in the total independence of the Sultan. The question arose: what did Germany want? Germany did not seem to want concrete territorial gains. German commercial interests did not ask their government to act on their behalf.[94] No one within the German government pushed for a war over Morocco. Tirpitz did not talk of war. Even Holstein, 'the driving force behind the whole affair', did not want war. He perhaps wanted concessions from France by means of a successful conference. Gradually, demands appeared in the German press for the 'resignation' of Delcassé and for submitting the Moroccan question to a conference. Delcassé was the man held chiefly responsible for bringing about the Anglo-French accord and for frustrating German efforts to come closer to Russia during the Russo-Japanese war. In June, Delcassé resigned. The following month, the French government accepted the demand for a conference. The Germans had perhaps calculated that the British would be glad to get out of the deal over Morocco and thus the Anglo-French accord would become bereft of any significance.

Britain, at this time, was engaged in negotiating the renewal of the alliance with Japan. Japan had already exposed the weakness of Russia's position, and, therefore, the entente with France seemed less necessary. During the summer of 1905, Britain tended to be concerned more about French feebleness than German bullying. France seemed to be dragging Britain into continental power politics. During autumn, there was very little contact between Britain and France, but Britain watched Germany's efforts to move closer to Russia with anxiety. German leaders had thought that the Anglo-French accord would break the Franco-Russian alliance. Since the summer of 1904, the Kaiser had been making efforts to effect a Russo-German rapprochement. On 24 July 1905, the famous meeting took place between Kaiser William II and Tsar Nicholas II at Bjorko in the Gulf of Bothnia near Finland. There some secret assurances for an accord were exchanged. At London, this raised the sceptre of the revival of the

Dreikaisersbund. There was a strong feeling at London that, blunted in the Far East, Russia would try to retrieve its prestige by aggressive moves towards India. An accord with Germany could provide Russia with just the right conditions for this purpose. At the same time, it was likely to impede all chances of a settlement between Britain and Russia, the Power with whom Lansdowne was most keen to improve relations.[95]

The international conference on Morocco was held at Algeciras in Spain in January 1906. But before this, there was a change of government at London. In December 1905 Balfour resigned and the Liberals formed the government under Henry Campbell-Bannerman. Edward Grey became the Foreign Secretary. In the elections held in January, the Liberals won a landslide victory, and this led to significant changes in the realm of domestic and commercial policies. But, in foreign affairs, Grey proved to be, to borrow Zara Steiner's phrase, 'an embodiment of continuity'.[96] He had long experience of foreign affairs. He had been the Parliamentary Under-Secretary during Rosebery's government and was acknowledged as the Liberal spokesman on foreign affairs when the Liberals were out of office. During the election campaign itself he had made it clear that he had no intention of changing the direction of foreign policy.

In January 1906, Cambon asked Grey about the stance Britain would take if Germany attacked France in the course of the dispute. At London, the feeling was that Germany was deliberately trying to break the entente and that a second overthrow of France by Germany would be prejudicial to Britain's interests, especially because Germany had emerged as a powerful industrial and military power. By this time the defeat of Russia in the Far East had generated confidence in Britain, but it had also strengthened Germany's position. In this situation, a sub-committee of strategists was appointed to consider this question. It reported that it would be necessary for Britain, in its own interest 'to lend France her active support' should a war break out.[97] Grey told Delcassé that Britain would observe an attitude of benevolent neutrality and, at the same time, added that in such an eventuality public opinion would be strongly moved in favour of France. He also warned the German ambassador that Britain was likely to support France. During the Algeciras Conference, Britain gave sustained support to France. In the settlement signed after this conference, Morocco was formally recognised as an international problem. The Moroccan bank and policing of ports were placed somewhat under international control. This amounted to considerable gains for Germany, but Spain, Italy, Russia and, of course, Britain, stood by France. The proceedings of the conference were seen as a diplomatic disaster for Germany.[98]

This crisis focused attention also on the nature of British strategy in the event of a European war. In a weighty speech delivered by Balfour on 11 May 1905 in the name of the CID, in which he dealt exhaustively with the roles of the army and navy in any attempted invasion of England, he accepted the Blue Water theories in an unequivocal manner. He assured the nation that, provided the navy was efficient, 'serious invasion of these islands is not an eventuality which we need seriously to consider'.[99] He added that the major military problem was

that of the defence of India, and the major task of the government was the despatch of regular army reinforcements from Britain to India. By implication, he underlined that the army was not needed for the defence of Britain's shores but was intended to take the field on the northwest of the Indian Empire. The newly constituted General Staff was not ready to confine its remodelled army to the task of defending India which was strewn with staggering difficulties of terrain, distance and supply of manpower. It wanted to retrieve its own and the army's position as an independent service arm and to break the monopoly of India in military thinking.[100]

In the summer of 1905, in view of the crisis in Morocco, a sub-committee of the CID was asked to investigate the possibilities of offensive operations on the continent.[101] The Admiralty thought in terms of capturing German colonies and assigning the usual secondary role to the army for diversionary attack on the German coast to relieve pressure on the French army. But, in the wargame played in this connection, the General Staff envisaged violation of Belgian neutrality by Germany and British action to defend it. General Grierson argued that if Germany invaded Belgium, Britain and France would have to jointly attack its flank. Even otherwise, Britain would have to support and reinforce France for reasons of morale.[102] The prospect of standing by France and Belgium in opposition to Germany could give the army the role it lacked. The army staff found allies in two very influential members of the CID who had direct access to the Cabinet, Clarke and Esher. Clarke considered efforts to plan strategy for Indian defence futile and endorsed the War Office stance.[103] Thus, before the Schlieffen Plan was finalised, the British General Staff was discussing the eventuality of Britain going to war with Germany on the issue of violation of Belgian neutrality.[104] For the moment, however, it was the reluctance of soldiers to reinforce the army in India that was making them consider alternate strategies.

An important offshoot of the Moroccan crisis was that secret military 'conversations' started between the General Staffs of Britain and France. The Admiralty contemplated an amphibious strike against the German coast and the War Office explored the possibility of despatching an expeditionary force to fight alongside the French. A parallel series of discussions took place with Belgium. There has been much controversy about the contents of the 'conversations', how far these amounted to Machiavellian cleverness on Grey's part and how committed Britain became to help France in a Franco-German war. In his defence, Grey always pointed out that these discussions had begun under Lansdowne and he merely authorised their continuation.[105]

The Anglo-Russian entente

As soon as the Treaty of Portsmouth had been signed in September, Balfour, Lansdowne and Clarke began to feel that the time was ripe for approaching Russia for the settlement of Central Asian quarrels. In October, 'to put the crown on all the French and Japanese agreements which have been so exceedingly well-received', Clarke prepared a note on the basis of agreement with

Russia.[106] Grey had made his position clear during the election campaign itself when he had expressed himself in favour of supporting France on the Moroccan issue, on the ground that otherwise Russia would not think it worthwhile to make a settlement with Britain.[107] After assuming office, he let the King know that an entente with Russia would 'complete and strengthen the entente with France and add very much to the comfort and strength of our position'.[108]

So far, Russia had not shown any inclination to make up with Britain. It was taken for granted at St Petersburg that any settlement with Britain would mean accepting finite limits to expansion towards the south-east and was, therefore, not acceptable. But after ignominious defeat and internal upheaval, Russia's policy makers had to take a fresh look at foreign policy. There were many who wanted to restore the alliance of the three eastern monarchies. Tsar Nicholas was amongst them; in fact, this was the purpose of the Bjorko meeting. It has been argued that if the German government had agreed to support Russia in Central Asia at Bjorko, the Anglo-Russian entente would not have been signed.[109] Other Russian statesmen, especially Lansdorff and Witte, wanted Russia to withdraw from the Dreikaisersbund and negotiate with Britain. They were stung by the fact that the German press had rejoiced at their discomfiture during the Russo-Japanese War. They were also conscious of their financial dependence on other countries. When Russia stood by France at Algeciras, the German government had advised its banks not to advance any loans to Russia. With improvement in relations with Britain there could be the hope of floating a loan on the London money market. This was the time when obstacles to the expansion of grain export had been growing. Russia's grain producers hoped to find a market in Britain. The Liberals in Russia, who had become influential after the Revolution of 1905, viewed efforts towards the establishment of Russo-German monarchical solidarity with suspicion. They were in favour of improving relations with Britain. Izvolsky, who succeeded Lamsdorff in 1906, also favoured this course. He wanted Russia to take renewed interest in the Balkans and in European affairs in general. Therefore, he wanted to come to some settlement with Britain on the Central Asian issue.

The negotiations opened officially on 7 June 1906, but they got off the ground only after Izvolsky paid a visit to Germany and gauged that Berlin was not hostile to Russia's efforts at rapprochement with Britain.[110] The process did not turn out to be smooth. The negotiations seemed to break down more than once. There were long periods of quiescence as well. Meanwhile, the question of Britain's capacity to defend the Indian Empire was studied at various levels and the conclusions uniformly confirmed the need to settle with Russia.

When the question of obtaining reinforcements for the Indian army from Japan was discussed further, the Japanese government showed extreme disinclination to send its soldiers. It stated that the presence of Japanese troops in India or of British troops in Manchuria, owing to differences of armament, food, race and customs, would cause difficulty in the line of communications and in the matter of supply.[111] The government of India expressed its own reservations about employing additional men on the north-west because of difficulties of

transporting them to the theatre of war and of ensuring supplies. It also pointed to the adverse effects of seeking Japan's co-operation on the prestige of the Raj.[112] Ultimately, at a conference held during May–June 1907, it was decided that Britain and Japan would act in their own spheres and each would try to create a diversion on behalf of its ally.[113] Clarke comments wryly: 'The Japanese have got all they wished, and we have got practically nothing'.[114] The Dominions also refused to share Britain's burdens. Colonial conferences were held in 1902 and 1907. In 1907, the desirability of establishing an Imperial General Staff was discussed, but the Dominions refused to make any definite military commitments.[115] Towards the end of 1906, the Liberal government appointed a committee to report on the military requirements of the empire. It was headed by John Morley, the Secretary of State for India, and included amongst its members Asquith, Grey and Haldane as well as the representatives from the army and the navy. It held six meetings during January–February 1907 and came to the unwelcome conclusion that a military establishment that would enable 100,000 men to be sent to India in the first year of war appeared to be a military necessity.[116] This amounted to the total acceptance of Kitchener's proposals. But resources were simply not available. Morley put the problem in a nutshell: 'We have not got the men and that's the plain truth of it'. To Minto, Morley wrote that the deliberations of the Committee 'showed what a tremendous load of military charge and responsibility you have to carry if you won't come to terms diplomatically with Russia'.[117] The War Office made its own very detailed survey of the resources of the Russian Empire. It reiterated the view that the number of men that Russia could pour into Central Asia was practically unlimited. The cost of fighting a successful war against Russia seemed so exorbitant that the War Office came to the ominous conclusion that, 'it will remain a question of practical politics whether it is worth our while to retain India or not'.[118] In short, the British government had not found any remedy for their worst case scenario. This strengthened the resolve not to let the negotiations lapse.

Morley had additional reasons as well for advocating a non-military solution to the problem of defence of the empire. In June 1906 he had committed himself to introducing 'Liberal' reforms in India giving some say to the Indians in the determination of policies. The success of any such policy depended on winning the goodwill of politically conscious Indians. Morley was conscious that any increase in military expenditure would exacerbate nationalist feelings in India and would hamper the success of his 'reforms' proposals. Only a settlement with Russia at the diplomatic level could prevent the government of India, especially Kitchener, from pressing for an increase in allocation in government of India's budget on armed forces.[119] The government of India under Curzon and Minto consistently had expressed itself against negotiating with Russia. It had no faith in the promises of the Russian government. The opposition of the government of India made Morley's support very valuable for Grey.

The British government wanted to create a cordon sanitaire against Russia's advance towards Britain's India. Grey wrote:

> The policy of the agreement is to begin an understanding with Russia, which may gradually lead to good relations in European Questions also and remove from her policy designs upon the Indian frontier either as an end in themselves or as a means of bringing pressure to bear upon us to overcome our opposition to her elsewhere. If this policy succeeds India will be relieved from apprehension and strain.[120]

So keen was the British government to call a truce in what was contemporaneously described as 'the great game in Asia' that it showed a readiness to take a sympathetic view of the fears and susceptibilities of the Russian statesmen. The Tsar conveyed that in view of 'the great disasters of the war', a treaty might be regarded as a sign of weakness, unless that treaty contained stipulations which were evidently advantageous to Russia.[121] Russian statesmen feared that the whole strategic status quo in Central Asia would be altered to Russia's great disadvantage if Britain made Anglo-Afghan relations more intimate, undertook to train its troops or constructed railways and roads in Afghanistan.[122] The visit of Amir Habibullah Khan to India in January–March 1907 seemed to confirm these suspicions. The Russian General Staff feared that the British might move into Afghanistan and stir up the Muslims in Central Asia.[123] Izvolsky, therefore, wanted an assurance that Afghanistan would not be transformed from a 'buffer state' into an avant-garde of the Indian Empire.[124] The British government viewed all these fears sympathetically. It also showed a readiness to recognise Russia's preponderance in northern Persia. Grey held that there was no way of preventing Russia from strengthening its hold there and, therefore, it was best to prevent Russia from establishing its hold over those parts 'which are dangerous to us'.[125]

The negotiations were opened with Tibet, because this issue was not expected to cause much difficulty. Even before the negotiations started, Grey and Morley had made it clear that their aim was not to consolidate, in any way, the position achieved for the British by colonel Younghusband. They merely wished to establish a friendly government in Tibet who would not interfere with the frontier and with Britain's 'comparatively insignificant trade interests'.[126] Before the negotiations started between London and St Petersburg, an Anglo-Chinese Convention had been signed in April 1906 under which the Chinese were allowed to pay off the Tibetan indemnity agreed under the Lhasa Convention of 1904. This implied recognition of China's suzerainty over Tibet. Under the Convention of 1907, Britain and Russia promised not to interfere in Tibet's internal administration and recognised nominal sovereignty of the Chinese government over Tibet.[127] The British government attached special importance to the settlement on Afghanistan because, as far as the general public was concerned, this was likely to be 'the most noticed section'.[128] Russia accepted that Afghanistan was outside its sphere of influence, that it would conduct political relations with Afghanistan via Whitehall and that no Russian agents would enter the country. On its part, the British government renounced any intention of occupying or annexing Afghanistan or interfering in its internal affairs.[129] The Foreign Office

was satisfied, for Britain had obtained in writing from Russia what had hitherto been only verbal assurances. As regards Persia, the Convention recognised the independence and integrity of Persia and went on to divide the country into three parts: Russian, British and a neutral zone between them. The two high contracting parties engaged not to seek for themselves or encourage their subjects or those of third powers to seek concessions of a political or commercial nature in the sphere of the other. The British sphere covered Seistan, Charbar and Bandar Abbas.[130] This was considered sufficient to ensure the security of the north-west frontier of the Indian Empire because Russia had agreed to exclude itself from Afghanistan.

To ward off any possible threat to the route to India, the government of India wanted a Russian 'hands off' declaration as regards the Persian Gulf region. But Nicolson warned that Izvolsky would never accept this as it involved German interests over the Baghdad railway.[131] Finally, a separate declaration was published which formally took note that Russia did not deny British interests in the status quo in the Gulf.[132] In May 1907, Benckendorff raised the issue of opening the straits. After Russia had started building its Black Sea Fleet in the 1880s, it had wanted to alter the status quo so as to permit use to the navies of only riparian powers, i.e., Turkey and itself. This issue acquired urgency after 1904 when Russia saw that it could not use its Black Sea fleet during the Russo-Japanese War. Russia was also using the straits route increasingly for the export of agricultural produce to Europe, which had become the major plank of the government's economic strategy. In times of peace, commercial use of the straits was freely permitted, but the Russian government and the agricultural and industrial lobbies wanted them to be opened to warships for the protection of trade, especially as a result of increasing political instability in this region since the 1890s. All this made it increasingly necessary for Russia's leaders to work for opening the straits to Russia's fleet.[133]

Britain's position in the Eastern Mediterranean had become much stronger after the decision to stay in Egypt. In 1903, the CID had noted that in view of the consolidation of Britain's position in Egypt, free Russian egress through the straits or even Russian occupation of the Dardanelles 'would not fundamentally alter the present strategic position in the Mediterranean'.[134] But Britain remained reluctant to relinquish its old objections to the opening of the straits. During the Russo-Japanese War, Britain had demonstrated its 'benevolent neutrality' towards Japan by insisting on the strict enforcement of the provisions relating to the Straits and had prevented Russia from using its Black Sea fleet. In 1907, Britain finally refused to reconsider the question of the opening of the Straits on the ground that it would involve the consent of the Powers who were signatories to the 1871 Convention signed at London.

Historiographically speaking, the accepted view on British foreign policy has been that antagonism between Britain and Germany was the main theme of the period from 1902 to 1907 and that the ententes with France and Russia emanated from the fear of Germany. Commenting on Lansdowne's period,

George Monger says that the most important event of his period of office was the estrangement from Germany.[135] On negotiations with Russia during 1906–7 this period, he comments: 'It is plain that the negotiations were dominated from beginning to end by fear of Germany'.[136] Zara Steiner also notes: 'The general fear of German ambitions as well as the specific concern with a Russo-German understanding was a constant Foreign Office pre-occupation throughout the negotiations'.[137] On Grey, Monger says that he 'put his fear of Germany at the centre of this policy, related everything to it, and thought of nothing else'.[138] It is remarkable that having argued that the most important feature of Balfour's and Lansdowne's policies was estrangement from Germany, Monger comments on discrepancy between this assessment and the tenor of his source material. On Lansdowne, he says: 'Lansdowne never really understood the most important event in his office, the event for which it is now remembered – "the estrangement with Germany".'[139] Similarly, he says that in Balfour's papers on the Triple Alliance, the Russian entente and Imperial Defence there is 'nothing to show that he understood the growing rivalry with Germany'.[140] Such divergence between the views of these statesmen and Monger's conclusions about the policies pursued by them point to the need to revise those conclusions. If the papers of Balfour and Lansdowne show that they did not understand rivalry with Germany, then the logical conclusion has to be that rivalry with Germany was not the main feature of this period. Their correspondence and memoranda show constant concern with the defence of India. To substantiate the view that antagonism with Germany was the main motive of Grey, some of his statements are very often quoted. One of these is that 'an entente between Russia, France and ourselves would be absolutely secure. If it is necessary to check Germany, it could then be done'.[141] But, in Grey's correspondence, as Keith Wilson also confirms, references to Germany are incidental while the desire to improve and maintain friendly relations with Russia is the running theme.[142] In 1912 he confirmed that 'the fons et origo' of the Anglo-Russian agreement was that Russia 'should not acquire influence or use what influence she had to disturb our Indian frontier'.[143] In his memoirs he wrote that 'the primary and cardinal' object of the entente was the security of the Indian Empire.[144]

The purpose of British foreign policy was to ensure the security of the British Isles as well as to maintain Britain's global position. Until the onset of the 'Dreadnought Era' in 1907, though Germany's growing economic, military and imperial power was watched with anxious concern, the British government did not see any military threat to Britain's security or its world status from Germany. Russia was the enemy. The entente with Russia was likely to make the Indian Empire secure. After 1907, too, the British government wanted to maintain the ententes not only to ward off the threat to balance of power in Europe from Germany's policies but also to preclude the emergence of a situation in which Britain might be called upon to cross swords with Russia. This forms the theme of the next chapter.

8 Nurturing the entente, 1907–14

Most contemporary observers tended to argue, and historians have tended to accept, that the chief features of international relations during 1907–14 were effervescence of Anglo-German antagonism[1] and the end of Anglo-Russian rivalry.[2] To the factors that had exacerbated Anglo-German relations so far – the colonial quarrels, the shift in economic power in Germany's favour and assertion centring on *weltpolitik* – was added the German decision to build dreadnoughts. To Britons, Germany seemed to be aiming at the creation of a navy that would be, to borrow Paul Kennedy's graphic description, like 'a sharp knife held gleaming and ready only a few inches away from the jugular vein of Germany's most likely enemy, Britain'.[3] The anxiety on this score was enhanced by the fact that Germany possessed the most efficient army as well. The rancorous feeling against Germany was very much in evidence in the calculations of the Foreign Office, the Admiralty, debates in Parliament, public speeches and comments in the press. As a result, most historians have also tended to see this as the motive force behind all diplomatic initiatives and manoeuvres during this period. In Anglo-Russian relations, the conclusion in 1907 of the Anglo-Russian entente by Henry Campbell-Bannerman's government has been seen as the culmination of efforts made by successive British governments at least since the 1880s to sign some agreement with Russia. By implication, it is presumed that after 1907, the British government was relieved of all anxieties centring on Russia's aims and policies.

An examination of Britain's foreign policy concerns during 1907–14, however, shows that both these impressions need to be re-examined. The British government and the people showed a single-minded commitment to maintaining their superiority over Germany in the naval field, and they were successful. Britain was able to outperform Germany in the construction of dreadnoughts. With a stronger navy and the English Channel dividing them from Germany, the British Isles seemed immune from attack. Besides, down to 1914, the two countries carried on negotiations to settle different points of dispute between them. In fact, during the two years preceding the outbreak of the war, there were clear signs of optimism in Anglo-German relations. Similarly, the signing of the Anglo-Russian entente did not automatically result in the establishment of friendly relations with Russia. Faith in the promises of

Russia remained minimal and the majority of ministers in the Cabinet, and Radical politicians generally, continued to dislike association with militarist and authoritarian Russia. But to the Foreign Secretary and the Foreign Office, it seemed vital to maintain friendly relations with Russia. Hence the entente had to be nurtured carefully.

In discussing foreign policy under Campbell-Bannerman and Asquith, it is also important to remember that many members of the Liberal Party as well as the Cabinet were of radical persuasion. In fact, it has been said that in the Liberal Cabinet of about twenty members, there were never more than five ministers with the same outlook as Grey.[4] The rest wanted to occupy a genuinely isolationist position and were opposed to alliances, both in principle and practice. They had welcomed the Anglo-French entente as a sign of good relations between two Liberal countries, but they remained opposed to the entente with Russia on grounds on which they opposed all decisions that smacked of militarism and jingoism. They were in favour of giving to Germany guarantee of the British neutrality in the event of a continental war. They objected to conscription because possession of a large army was expensive and was likely to encourage the government to embark upon expansive ventures. They supported their government's efforts to arrive at some general diplomatic agreement with Germany, or at least to arrive at some settlement on the naval issue. Grey continually had to look over his shoulder to appease their suspicions. They disliked the use of the phrase 'the Triple Entente' for the new relationship between Britain, France and Russia.[5] In order to placate them, the Foreign Office was instructed to avoid the use of phrases like 'cornerstone of foreign policy' and 'bedrock of foreign policy' to describe the Russian connection.[6] In 1908, considerable omissions were made from the Blue Book on Persia so as not to publish anything which could cause embarrassment to the Russian government.[7]

Grey and the Foreign Office showed a readiness 'to stake everything' on maintaining the entente with Russia. In 1912, Grey wrote to Hardinge, who had become the Viceroy and Governor-General of India in 1910, 'If it were to go everything would be worse.'[8] In the correspondence of Grey, Hardinge, Nicolson and others, one comes across such statements frequently.[9] Why were they so keen to maintain the entente? It has been argued that the aim was to provide a counterpoise to the power of Germany. Zara Steiner comments: 'Grey and his officials well appreciated the value of a "Triple Entente" to contain German ambitions.'[10] It is true that any success of Germany on the continent could make Germany a power of Napoleonic proportions. Britain had no means to meet German power on land. It maintained only a small army of six divisions, which Henry Wilson, the Director of Military Operations, described as 'fifty too few'.[11] Only France and Russia possessed the armed strength to meet the German challenge on land. But Britain did not have to maintain friendly relations with France for that reason. As long as Germany occupied Alsace and Lorraine, France was likely to join any war against Germany in any case. An important consideration in forming the entente with France was the opportunity it provided to develop friendly relations with Russia so that the latter would not place itself

in opposition to Britain in the Near East or Central Asia. This very reason seemed to make it imperative to maintain the 'Triple Entente'. Throughout this period, Britain carried on protracted negotiations with Germany. It is significant that throughout these negotiations the British government hankered to find a political formula that would improve relations with Germany, without being open to misconstruction in France or Russia.[12] The entente had not dissipated apprehensions regarding Russia's capacity to reach the Indian frontier. Nicolson put the problem succinctly: 'She could hit us where we were powerless.'[13] No British government could afford to overlook the fact that Britain simply did not possess human or material resources to fight Russia in that region. After 1910, as reports about the recovery of Russia began to circulate, fear of Russia gave place to virtual myopia about Russia's capacity. 'The Great Game in Asia' thus did not end in 1907. Constant efforts had to be made to maintain the goodwill of Russia. As in previous decades, the worst scenario for the British government remained the revival of the Dreikaisersbund which, it was feared, would remove the energies of Russia from the Balkans and would enable Russia to concentrate on the Indian frontier. The problem was stated by Grey in a communication to C.P. Scott of the *Manchester Guardian* in 1912: 'if France retired, Russia would at once do the same and we should again be faced with the old troubles about the frontiers of India. It would also mean complete ascendancy of Germany in Europe'.[14] This provides the key to Britain's foreign policy during 1907–14.

The dreadnought issue

On 10 February 1906, Britain launched the battleship *Dreadnought* at Plymouth. It was a much larger and more powerful ship than anything afloat. The launching of this ship meant that all navies would have to start anew from point zero.[15] Germany acted quickly. In November 1907, the German government announced its intention to build dreadnoughts. In 1908, the Reich adopted a naval programme providing for the construction of four dreadnoughts annually from 1908 to 1911, and two annually from 1912 to 1917. With this began what became the most celebrated arms race in history up to that time.

The German decision touched the British nation at its most sensitive point. It created an uproar in the British press. The number of dreadnoughts became a benchmark for naval strength. The Admiralty immediately demanded an increase in British estimates to compensate for the new German programme. On becoming Foreign Minister in December 1905, Grey had not viewed the German decision to build a navy as a 'hostile act' against Britain.[16] But after the German decision to build dreadnoughts, it became 'the one subject of interest to the exclusion of all other questions'.[17] The Liberal government resorted to a quantitative arms race with Germany despite emphatic pledges during the election campaign to reduce defence expenditure and devote itself to social reform, and despite being troubled by internal problems centring on industrial unrest, Ireland, and a little later, the constitutional crisis.

The country showed a single-minded determination to pre-empt a situation

where an inferior naval power could threaten its naval mastery. Each decision by Germany to add to its fleet was followed by a rancorous debate in Britain after which, each time, the British government took the decision that the German fleet should be outbuilt. In November 1907, Grey claimed that Germany was a long way behind Britain: 'We shall have seven Dreadnoughts afloat before they have one, without our laying down any more. In 1910 they will have four to our seven, but between now and then there is plenty of time to lay down new ones if they do so.'[18] In early 1909, Britain had a grand total of eighteen big ships building and projected as against thirteen by Germany. Until the coming of the dreadnoughts, the Admiralty had based its plans on French warship plans and had adopted the two-power standard. By 1901, naval mastery meant supremacy over Germany. In this year it was decided that Britain must maintain a ratio of 16 : 10 with the German navy.[19]

Neither opposition from the Radicals in the Cabinet and the Liberal Party nor chronic complaints of shortage of funds could make Britain abandon the policy of naval supremacy.[20] In 1909, R. McKenna, the First Lord of Admiralty, wanted sanction to build six dreadnoughts. The 'reductionists' in the Cabinet thought that construction of four dreadnoughts would enable Britain to maintain a safe margin. But, when this decision was announced, there was an uproar in the press and the country at large in favour of eight dreadnoughts, and this number were ultimately laid down. Winston Churchill commented in his characteristic style, 'The Admiralty had demanded six ships, the economists offered four and we finally compromised on eight.'[21] In 1909, when the government needed to raise £38 million for naval estimates alone, Asquith feared that the proposal would lead to 'an open rebellion'.[22] But nothing of this sort happened. The country even accepted large increases in income tax. Belief in naval superiority cut across party and class lines. In 1889–90, the year when the 'two-power standard' was adopted, Britain's naval spending represented 17.46 per cent of government revenue. In 1913–14, on the eve of the war, it represented 26.03 per cent of government revenue. As Keith Neilson comments, these figures demonstrate that there was no financial barrier to maintaining the British navy as the world's pre-eminent naval force and that there was political willingness to see it done.[23] Britain was able to maintain overwhelming superiority. The relative naval position of Britain, Germany and France on the eve of the First World War can be gauged from Table 8.1. As we shall see, in the autumn of 1912 and again in the summer of

Table 8.1 Relative naval strength of Britain, France and Germany, 1913–14

	Dreadnoughts	*Battlecruisers*	*Pre-Dreadnought Battleships*
Britain	24	9	40
Germany	16	6	30
France	10	0	15

Source: The table has been compiled from figures given in Neilson (1991: 705).

1914, Tirpitz drew back from the eventuality of war[24] and Britain's superiority was a powerful reason behind this decision.[25]

The crisis in the Near East, 1908–9

The first diplomatic issue that confronted London after the signing of the Anglo-Russian entente centred on Izvolsky's attempt to revise the straits rules. His hopes of opening the straits to Russian warships had been encouraged by Britain's attitude during the negotiations for the entente. In June 1908, King Edward VII and Tsar Nicholas II met at Reval (now Tallin). This meeting was seen as a demonstration of friendly relations. It acquired additional significance because Admiral Fisher, Sir John French, Sir Charles Hardinge, Stolypin, the Russian prime minister, and Izvolsky were also present. Later, Izvolsky held that at Reval the British gave the Russians an understanding that Britain would support a revision of the straits rule in Russia's favour. Historians have not found any evidence of this in the accounts of Hardinge or of Izvolsky himself,[26] but the conversations there must have encouraged Izvolsky to look for requisite opportunity.

The very next month, in July, there was a revolt in Macedonia. This spread rapidly and, by the end of the month it had grown into what became known as the Young Turk movement, headed by the Committee of Union and Progress. Sultan Abdul Hamid was forced to grant a constitution. The Liberals saw in these events the prospect of the end of autocratic rule and the establishment of a constitutional and progressive regime at Constantinople. In the diplomatic world, these developments ignited old anxieties and ambitions. In London, when the Sultan had given a railway concession in Macedonia to Russia, Hardinge had mused: 'the struggle between Austria and Russia in the Balkans is evidently now beginning, and we shall not be bothered by Russia in Asia…The action of Austria will make Russia lean on us more and more in the future. In my opinion this will not be a bad thing.'[27] It was from this angle that events in the Near East were watched by Whitehall. At St Petersburg, Izvolsky saw in these events the opportunity to settle the straits issue by coming to some arrangement with Austria-Hungary. He met Aehrenthal, the Austrian Foreign Minister, at Buchlov in Moravia on 15 September 1908 to discuss the situation. There he showed willingness to accept annexation by Austria of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the provinces which Austria-Hungary had 'occupied' in 1878, in return for Austria's support in the opening of the straits to Russian warships. This arrangement involved changes in the Treaty of Berlin and had, therefore, to be submitted to a conference of European powers. Therefore, Izvolsky left for a tour of European capitals to secure their assent.

Izvolsky and Aehrenthal had not signed any written agreement, and bitter differences emerged later between the two.[28] However, before Izvolsky completed the round of European capitals, on 5 October, Vienna announced that it had annexed Bosnia and Herzegovina. At the same time Bulgaria declared itself independent and Crete announced its unification with Greece.

Izvolsky, then in Paris, found these developments very humiliating. There was great indignation at Constantinople also. The 'Young Turk' government looked to London for rectifying these violations of the Berlin Settlement of 1878. On 9 October, Izvolsky reached London. The British government did not know the details of the agreement made between Izvolsky and Aehrenthal at Buchlov. Izvolsky at this time made a new proposal. He suggested that in time of peace, the ingress and egress of the straits should be open to the warships of the riparian powers of the Black Sea under certain conditions.[29] He wanted thus to secure an advantageous position for Russia as well as to retrieve his own position at St Petersburg.

Soon after the Anglo-French entente, when a crisis had emerged in Anglo-French relations on Morocco, Britain had stoutly stood by France. But this time Britain decided not to support Russia, despite the fact that there had been rethinking at Whitehall on the issue of passage through the straits. The Black Sea strategy was no longer considered viable. A feeling had grown that from the point of view of Britain's strategic interests, closing of the straits to Russian warships was not really crucial. Relations with Turkey were not cordial. Hardinge testified that it was 'already a settled principle of naval warfare with us that in no case would our fleet enter the Straits unless Turkey was an ally'.[30] There was also sympathy for Russia's aspirations. In a letter to Riffat Pasha, Turkish Minister for Foreign Affairs, Grey wrote that the British government had 'felt for some years that the international denial to Russia of all egress through the Straits was a thing which could not be maintained forever'.[31] However, despite these views, Whitehall decided not to support Russia on this issue. The reason was, as it had always been, that such a provision would have given Russia the advantage of an inviolable harbour and a base for quick raids in a crucial area on the route to India without reciprocal advantage. Britain did not want the goodwill of Russia at the cost of seeing it entrenched on the route to India. Ultimately, Britain offered to support a modification of the straits rule on the basis of giving reciprocal rights to all belligerents in time of war. This did not suit St Petersburg. Thereafter, the question of the straits was not raised until October 1911.

The crisis in the Balkans, however, dragged on for months. The government at Constantinople was shaken by the loss of its sovereignty over Bosnia, Herzegovina and Bulgaria, and wanted some compensation. In Serbia, the issue created popular clamour for war. In 1903, a new dynasty had been established there by a group of intensely nationalist officers who were determined to incorporate all those areas where Serbs lived into their own state. By 1908, Serbia had emerged as the strongest state in the Balkans. Along with Montenegro, Serbia demanded territorial compensation from Austria-Hungary and even partially mobilized its army. The British government refused to let Russia change the Straits Convention, but in the Balkans it extended support to Russia. At first, to settle the Turkish dispute, the idea of an international conference was mooted. But ultimately, bilateral talks were held and negotiations and threats of war followed during which Grey warned the government at Constantinople that if it

became involved in any war with Bulgaria, Britain would not help. Ultimately, Turkey agreed to accept monetary compensation from Bulgaria and Austria-Hungary. Russia decided to support Serbia's demand for territorial compensation. Britain also decided to stand by Serbia, though few in London cared about the lot of 'wretched Serbians'. Throughout this period, the prospect of a European war loomed large on the horizon.

Austria-Hungary had decided on annexation without any consultation with the German government. This did arouse some resentment at Berlin. But at Wilhelmstrasse, the coming together of Britain and Russia had been watched with anxious concern and the Reval meeting had ignited fears that Germany was being encircled by a ring of hostile powers. In this background, Berlin decided to stand by its only reliable ally, Austria-Hungary. This made the latter take a stiff stand in negotiations with Serbia and Turkey. In January 1909, Berlin gave assurances that it would stand by Austria in a preventive war if Austria so decided, as also in the contingency of a direct military attack on Austria. This was followed by sabre-rattling with a vengeance. On 22 March Germany issued an ultimatum to St Petersburg demanding recognition of annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina by Austria-Hungary and threatened that war would break out if Russia refused. Thereafter, Russia decided to abandon the Serb cause.

During this crisis, Whitehall went as far as it could to stand by St Petersburg so as to preserve the entente. It did not support the government at Constantinople despite the fact that the Liberals had welcomed the prospect of the establishment of a constitutional government there. Grey warned Turkey not to expect support from Britain in a war with Bulgaria. He admitted to Gerald Lowther, the British ambassador at Constantinople, that it was not from blindness or any light reason that Britain risked its popularity at Constantinople.[32] When Izvolsky asked Grey directly whether if Russia was involved in a war with Austria and Germany, Britain would extend support, the latter refused to answer such a hypothetical question.[33] But Grey knew that if there was a war as a consequence of Germany's support for Austria-Hungary, 'it would be very difficult for Britain to keep out of it'.[34] In May 1901, he let Hardinge, at that time ambassador at St Petersburg, say that the Russians 'must realise that in the event of a general conflagration in which they are associated as allies of France, it is not likely that we shall not actively participate'.[35] Britain chose to be on the side of Russia on issues that did not affect the security of the Indian Empire or the routes thereto.

Britain and France: the Moroccan crisis

On the Moroccan issue also, Britain sought to ensure that the ententes with France and Russia were not adversely affected. In November 1909, there had been a quarrel between France and Germany on what became known as the Casablanca incident. This issue was settled by arbitration. After prolonged negotiations the two countries signed an agreement under which, while still professing to respect the independence and integrity of Morocco, Germany recognised

France's special political interests in preserving peace and order while France recognised that Germany enjoyed equality of economic opportunity. At this time, France did not consult Britain.[36] Many influential circles in France expressed themselves in favour of a general settlement with Germany, which aroused vague apprehensions at London about the loyalty of France to the entente. But Asquith and Grey were clear about one thing: if relations between France and Germany deteriorated, it was not possible to 'fold our hands and look on'.[37]

This was also the time when pourparlers were going on between Britain and Germany on the question of naval programmes. As a precondition for naval limitation, Germany insisted on a pledge of neutrality on Britain's part in case there was war between the Triple Alliance and the Franco-Russian Alliance. Britain merely offered not to join in any unprovoked attack on Germany. On its own part, Britain did not ever really state what it did want from Germany in return for a reduction in the pace of Germany's shipbuilding programme and acknowledging Britain's naval superiority.[38] However, Whitehall made it clear that it could not enter into any political understanding with Germany which meant separation from France and Russia. In July 1910, dilating on the difficulty of making any political arrangement with Germany, Grey told the Cabinet: 'France and Russia would regard any such agreement with suspicion and all the blessings of the entente with France and Russia would go, and we might again be on the verge of war with one or other of these Powers.'[39]

Even before these negotiations concluded, another crisis developed in Morocco. In May 1911, there were 'disturbances' in Fez, the capital of Morocco. From the beginning, the whole question was seen as an issue between European countries. The French government sent an expedition to establish 'order'. Britain was not consulted. A fortnight later, Spain also sent troops. France denounced this action as a violation of the Algeciras Act. France waited anxiously for Germany's reaction. Germany looked upon the French action as a breach of the Algeciras Act, and chose to use theatrical tactics to display its displeasure. The German warship *Panther* was ordered to drop anchor at Agadir on the Atlantic coast of Morocco, which it did on 1 July. Negotiations were opened to settle the issue. Germany wanted to obtain 'suitable compensation' from France's colonial possessions. Gradually, Germany made it clear that it wanted France to cede practically the whole of the Congo. This surprised the French government.

France turned to its friends. Russia did make representations at Berlin, but only in a perfunctory way. This was the time, the summer of 1911, when Russia was carrying on conversations with Germany at Potsdam on the Baghdad Railway, Persia and the issues relating to Europe. It did not want this process to end prematurely. Besides, France had also not taken much interest in Russia's concerns in the Balkans. At London, the Cabinet, the Foreign Office and the strategists showed a determination to stand by France. Not only Grey and Asquith, but also the former pro-Germans – Lloyd George, Winston Churchill and Haldane – expressed themselves very strongly in favour of supporting France. The strategists also displayed as much determination. This period did

see a War Office–Admiralty quarrel but, as Paul Kennedy says, this was about how to support France, not whether to support France.[40]

The negotiations between France and Germany proceeded very slowly. The British Cabinet resolved that Germany must not be allowed to secure a port on the Mediterranean coast of Morocco, that sufficient support should be given to France so as to prevent it from falling under Germany and that the Moroccan issue should not be treated as a *casus belli*.[41] Grey, therefore, did not yield to French pressure to define British policy. In this situation, on 21 July, Lloyd George delivered a speech at Mansion House in which he said that Britain demanded that it be consulted on all vital international issues. This speech was in line with the deliberations in the Cabinet, though it was perhaps not discussed there.[42] It exacerbated tension between Britain and Germany. The British government stood by France not because of the terms of the Anglo-French entente but because of a desire to maintain the entente. In September 1911, Grey wrote to Goschen: 'I daren't press the French more about the Congo. If I do so we may eventually get the odium in France for an unpopular concession and the whole entente may go.'[43] France remained grateful for this speech at Mansion House, which enabled France to become more assertive in negotiations with Germany. In November, France and Germany were able to reach a settlement. Germany recognised the French protectorate over Morocco and ceded to France a small tract of Cameroon territory, while France ceded to Germany a substantial part of Congo. With this, the second Moroccan crisis ended. But, by this time, a political crisis was brewing in London.

As a corollary to this diplomatic support, the issue of extending military support to France had to be taken up. On 23 August 1911, the Committee of Imperial Defence discussed the question. Some ministers were also invited. Rival strategies of the navy and army were taken up. The Admiralty favoured amphibious operations while the army forwarded the plan to fight along the French and Belgian borders. On this occasion, Henry Wilson very lucidly presented his view on how the six or seven divisions of the British Expeditionary Force would balance out the German army's expected numerical preponderance on the north-west of France.[44] After this, the strategy of sending the British Expeditionary Force to the aid of France was never reversed. Wilson settled with his French counterparts the plans for British intervention down to the last detail.[45] There was such readiness to help France militarily that, in October, when it was discovered that McKenna had not implemented instructions given by Asquith in 1909 regarding plans for the despatch of the British Expeditionary Force to France, he was shifted from the Admiralty and was given the Home Office portfolio.[46]

In the summer of 1911, Balfour, at that time the leader of the Conservative Party, pledged support of his party to the policy of giving military aid to France in case of attack by Germany. But within the Cabinet, this question of aid to France created an explosion of resentment which continued for months. During the first Morocco crisis, military 'conversations' had begun between the staffs of Britain and France. These had been carried on secretly, without reference to the

full Cabinet. Subsequently, these had lapsed. When these 'conversations' were revived in 1911, the whole Cabinet came to know about these. This caused a furore.[47] This came at a time when disenchantment with France and Russia had been growing. Ministers expressed resentment over the fact that France had sent an army to Fez without consulting London. Russia's conduct in Persia was becoming a matter of concern. At Berlin, taking advantage of the indignation in his country, Tirpitz was planning a big increase in naval strength. In this situation, the Radical ministers insisted on the policy of opening negotiations with Germany. In February 1912, Haldane, with whom Grey was on most intimate terms, was sent to Berlin to gauge the feeling there. But the effort got off to a bad start. The day before Haldane reached Berlin, the Nouvelle of 1912 was published. It provided that three additional capital ships would be laid down, and the number of battleships and battlecruisers in the active fleet would be substantially increased. Haldane failed to persuade Bethmann-Hollweg, the German Chancellor, to agree to a reduction in the naval programme. The most Germany offered, was a reduction in the rate of increase. In return it asked Britain to pledge benevolent neutrality if either signatory became entangled in a war with third parties.[48] For Britain, the commitment to the French remained the first priority. Grey wrote to Sir Francis Bertie, the ambassador at Berlin: 'though we are quite prepared to satisfy them, we have no intention of attacking them or supporting an aggressive policy against them, we must keep our hands free to continue the relations we already have with France'.[49] Whitehall was at best ready to give the assurance that Britain would not join any unprovoked attack on Germany. This did not suit Berlin particularly because the German General Staff had taken the decision to act on the Schlieffen Plan, and its implementation was likely to be regarded in Britain as an aggressive act. The talks thus broke down in March. The German government not only decided to go ahead with the new supplementary naval law but also to increase land forces in order to ensure the numbers necessary to implement the Schlieffen Plan.

This vast increase in the German naval programme, together with the fact that Italy and Austria decided to build new dreadnought-type ships, made the Admiralty consider ways to protect its interests in the Mediterranean and the North Sea without incurring additional expenditure. In this situation Winston Churchill, who had moved to the Admiralty in October 1911, proposed that Britain's battleships should be moved from the Mediterranean to 'home' waters. The CID discussed many alternatives.[50] At this stage the French offered to protect Britain's Mediterranean interests if London would do the same for French interests in the Channel and southern North Sea, from where France would withdraw its ships. The British government decided to adopt this option. The general opinion was that an understanding with France, even at the price of some reciprocal commitment, offered 'the cheapest, simplest and safest solution'.[51] However, some senior imperialists, navalists and Radicals expressed misgivings.[52] As a result of their pressure, the government decided to adopt a 'one power standard' against the Austrian fleet as the basis of Britain's strength in the Mediterranean.[53]

In return for defending Britain's interests in the Mediterranean, the French wanted that there should be some agreement about joint consultation in the event of a threat to either country. Asquith and Grey were already confronted with virtual revolt in their party. In December 1911, about eighty Liberal MPs had formed the Liberal Foreign Affairs Committee to check the government's tendency to move too close to Russia and France at the expense of a better understanding with Germany. In view of this, there were elaborate drafting exercises and, ultimately in November 1912, the exchange of Grey–Cambon notes was effected. These provided that, in times of crises, the two countries would automatically consult each other. Staff talks were acknowledged, though there were inevitable references to their non-binding character and a provision that before implementation the talks would require prior sanction of the Cabinet. It is significant that the whole Cabinet accepted this exchange of notes, not just the Liberal-Imperialist clique. It is also notable that the Radical MPs did not force through a denunciation of the ententes even though the Moroccan Crisis had produced a revanchist government in France under Poincaré. With this redistribution of fleets and exchange of letters, the expectation that Britain would stand by France increased. Outside official circles, references to the 'inevitable' struggle between Britain and Germany became very frequent. Exaggerated stories about German 'spies' in Britain were already circulating. The establishment used the situation to expand the secret service, censorship and intelligence work within Britain against a supposed foreign menace.[54] As far as Anglo-French relations were concerned, Britain was committed to defending the French coastline in the event of German attack in return for the French promise to defend the Mediterranean.

Towards the end of 1912, Whitehall still insisted that 'although we cannot bind ourselves under all circumstances to go to war with France against Germany, we shall also certainly not bind ourselves to Germany not to assist France'.[55] But this was merely a theoretical statement of their position. Grey and Nicolson had consistently opted for maintaining the ententes with France and Russia. Churchill's 'holiday proposals' confirmed this further. Twice in 1912 and once in 1913, Churchill put forward the suggestion to the naval powers that they join Britain in taking a holiday from building battleships. The proposals arose largely out of political problems within Britain, where there were bitter dissensions within the ruling party on the question of rising expenditure on armaments. It also had the advantage of freezing the balance of naval power in Britain's favour. The proposal did generate general discussion on the subject, but no country, except the United States, reacted favourably. In exchange for accepting the proposal, Berlin demanded the earlier price, a pledge of British neutrality in case Germany became involved in a general war. But in each such suggestion, Britain had seen a desire on Germany's part to gain hegemony in Europe by creating estrangement between Britain and its entente partners. France was also disinclined to accept the proposal on the ground that if Germany curtailed its expenditure on the navy, it would divert the savings to building its army.[56] This made the Foreign Office less enthusiastic. It had no

wish to prise apart the whole diplomatic structure centring on the ententes. However, the rejection of this proposal by Germany helped to create a domestic political consensus for increased spending on armaments.

Britain and Russia: the Balkan wars

Britain had not offered any assistance to the Young Turks when Austria and Bulgaria had violated the integrity of their state during 1908–9. After the Bosnian crisis, too, Britain remained almost passive with regard to the disputes and revolts in this region. The Russian government, smarting from its discomfiture, decided to strengthen its position in the Near East. It tried to negotiate with the Turks on the straits issue. Thereafter, pourparlers were carried on during 1910–11 between Tsar Nicholas II and Kaiser William II at Potsdam. Sergei Sazanov, the new Foreign Minister, was also present there. These did not yield any specific agreement beyond tacit understanding on issues relating to Persia and the Baghdad railway. But Britain watched these meetings nervously because of fears centring on the resurrection of that 'chronic condition', the Dreikaisersbund. This was the reason why Britain merely looked on when in September 1911, Italy, galvanised into action by French successes in Morocco, invaded Tripoli. In order to enlist Italy's support against Austria, Russia wished to stand by Italy and Britain decided to stand by Russia. Italy had its way and annexed Tripoli the following month. This was also the reason why Grey strongly resisted all suggestions to detach Italy from the Triple Alliance by taking advantage of the tenuous connection of Italy with this alliance. Italy was likely to respond favourably. Because of its long coastline, Italy's security was dependent on the goodwill of Britain and France.[57] Besides, under the Franco-Italian Agreement of 1902, Italy had agreed not to join in any German attack on France. But Grey did not make any attempt to woo Italy. He felt that Britain's interests would not be served by the dissolution of the Triple Alliance because this would encourage Germany to think of reviving the Dreikaisersbund.[58]

In 1912, the Balkan states – Bulgaria, Serbia, Greece and Montenegro – signed a series of alliances and created a defensive and offensive league to extend their territories, obviously at the expense of Ottoman possessions in the Balkans. On 8 October, Montenegro invaded Turkey. Soon the other allies joined. Throughout the war, the Balkan states were deluged with appeals from the Great Powers to end hostilities, while the Ottoman government was deluged with appeals to conciliate the people of Macedonia by making concessions. The Balkan states quickly won a series of major victories. Within a month, every Turkish army in Europe was defeated. Problems arose on the two extremities of the Ottoman Empire in Europe. In the west, Serbia conquered Ottoman territories along the Adriatic coast. On the eastern side, by early November, the Bulgarian army reached the very gates of Constantinople. All the Great Powers watched the events in the Balkans with great interest and anxiety. Austria and Italy were perturbed by the successes of Serbia. Berchtold, the new Austrian Foreign Minister, became a staunch advocate of the policy of establishing an

autonomous state of Albania, which the Albanians had been demanding so as to prevent Serbia from reaching the Adriatic Sea. In Britain, the Radicals within the Cabinet and outside watched the success of the Balkan states with apparent delight because it seemed to symbolise the triumph of nationalism. Russia too was elated because the Balkan League had been formed under Russia's patronage.

Whitehall was, however, perturbed by this development. The reason often forwarded in this context has been that the Muslims, who looked upon the Ottoman ruler as the Khalifa, would resent the end of the Ottoman Empire.[59] But important strategic considerations also entered the calculations of Britain's policy makers. Disappearance of the Ottomans from Constantinople was likely to lead to the disintegration of their Asiatic Empire as well. The British government wanted continuance of Ottoman control over its Asiatic Empire because it acted as a dyke to check the advance of Russia towards the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf.[60] Besides, the success of the Balkan states created the spectre of war between Austria and Russia in the Near East, with the corresponding fear that Germany might then unleash a war towards its west.[61] Haldane on 3 December 1912 and Grey the next day warned Lichnowsky, the German ambassador in London, that under 'no circumstances would England tolerate the overthrow of the French' and if Austria, Russia and France were involved in war, 'no one could tell what further developments might follow'.[62] In other words, if Germany joined in, it would have to reckon with Britain. The Director of Military Operations began a study of the question of transportation of the Expeditionary Force.[63] The implications of these warnings were not lost on the German government. The Kaiser took Haldane's words as 'a moral declaration of war'.[64] He immediately summoned major civil and military advisers to work out a scheme for the invasion of Britain. At this conference, Tirpitz expressed himself against an immediate resort to arms and demanded a postponement of the struggle for eighteen months.[65] In this context, it has also been argued that the British Cabinet was not really thinking of Germany's attack on France. The real fear that gripped London was that in order to avoid a war in the Near East, Berlin might negotiate with St Petersburg on some very liberal terms and thus resurrect the Dreikaisersbund.[66] This had been Britain's nightmare because of its connection with the security of the north-west frontier of the Indian Empire.

While giving thought to the eventuality of a great power conflict, Britain and Germany had also talked of ways of avoiding the escalation of the Balkan wars into a general war. On 3 December, the belligerents – the Balkan states and Turkey – agreed to an armistice and to holding a peace conference at London. This opened at St James's Palace on 16 December. Grey presided over its sessions. At its meetings, compensations were arranged for the victors while the Great Powers worked to safeguard their interests.[67] Despite the mediating role expected of him, Grey tended to give in to the wishes of Russia, as the prolonged dispute on the issue of assigning the town of Scutari made clear. The Great Powers had resolved that it should go to Albania but, in April 1913, it was seized by Montenegro. The Powers decided to hold a naval demonstration.

Russia implored Britain and France to take part in this, though failing to participate itself. This threat worked, and Montenegro gave way. Grey's conduct on this issue clearly demonstrates that whenever the concert and entente diplomacies clashed, Grey would work to preserve the entente.[68] Ultimately, the Treaty of London was signed by all the Balkan allies on 30 May 1913. It confirmed the loss to Turkey of all its European territory except the area around Constantinople. Greece and Serbia were the principal beneficiaries, but Bulgaria and Montenegro also acquired some territories. A new state of Albania, which had a Muslim majority, was created.

Within a month, war started once again amongst the victors over the division of spoils. When Bulgaria was engaged in fighting outside Constantinople, Serbia and Greece occupied most of Macedonia. This caused resentment at Sophia. On 29 June 1913, without warning, Bulgaria attacked Serbian and Greek positions in Macedonia. Rumania, which had remained neutral so far, joined the war against Bulgaria. Bulgaria was badly defeated, and even Turkey recaptured Adrianople. On 10 August a chastened Bulgaria signed the Treaty of Bucharest which formally confirmed the loss to Serbia of much of Macedonian territory. At this stage Russia cast a covetous eye on Adrianople. This had never been acceptable to Britain. Grey was unequivocal in insisting on a hands-off policy even though it created bitterness between the two. Turkey remained in possession of Adrianople and made an offer of an alliance to Britain. The war ended officially in August with the Treaty of Bucharest, but instability continued in this region on issues relating to the implementation of this treaty and on account of the conflicting ambitions of Austria-Hungary and Serbia over control of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The entente in Asia

In Asia, too, the British government carefully nurtured the Anglo-Russian entente. The aim was frankly to keep Russia away from the territorial rim of India. This made Britain willing to accommodate Russia in Europe as well. In April 1909 Hardinge wrote, and Asquith and Grey concurred, that even a pro-German orientation on the part of Russia in Europe need not and should not lead to the collapse of the Anglo-Russian understanding in Asia.[69] But, after 1912, when Russia was seen as casting covetous eyes on Herat and extending its influence at Lhasa and in the neutral zone in Persia, anxiety levels rose. In this context, Ira Klein has argued that the Anglo-Russian convention failed to fulfil the aim of halting Russia's expansion in areas strategically crucial to the defence of India and that in Central Asia, after 1912, it hindered rather than furthered Britain's quest for security.[70] But it would be well to remember that, while desirous of halting the expansion of Russia, the British government remained conscious that it did not have the human and material resources to challenge Russia in any of these regions. Besides, while Britain watched any increase in the power of Russia nervously, it was not willing to bring the states in India's vicinity into its own orbit. It was not the Anglo-Russian Convention that hindered the

quest for security, it was the need to ensure the security of India without teeth and muscle which made Britain opt for friendly relations with Russia. The British government was forced to maintain 'cool heads and [a] civil tongue' also because the Amir of Afghanistan had not given his consent to the Convention.[71] The government of India did not want to antagonise him. As Minto wrote: 'The Amir is a more dangerous neighbour to us than Russia and, therefore, in respect to India a more necessary friend.'[72] The Amir could not be coerced because experiences in this direction had been bloodily bitter. The Convention had not thus technically come into force, and Whitehall feared that Russia could repudiate it on this ground alone.

Initially, Britain and Russia were able to co-operate in Afghanistan and Persia. Izvolsky was trying to secure the revision of the Straits Convention, for which he needed Britain's support. In July 1908, when there was a problem on the Russo-Afghan frontier near Herat, Russia conducted negotiations with the Afghans through the British.[73] Similarly, in Persia, where Tehran saw a struggle for power following the granting of a constitution by Shah Muzaffar-al-Din, the ambassadors of the two countries were able to maintain most cordial relations. London instructed Sir George Barclay, the British ambassador at Tehran, to co-operate with Russia despite the embarrassment that the comments from the Radicals caused to the government.[74] Both countries worked to take advantage of their positions in their own spheres. The British and Indian governments built up strong economic stakes by obtaining road and rail concessions and by subsidising shipping services. In 1908, a British syndicate struck oil in the British sphere in southern Persia. This was quickly recognised as a substantial source of fuel. The Admiralty watched this development with relish. The British government decided to back the Anglo-Persian Oil Company, which was purely British, rather than the National Bank of Turkey, which was collaborating with British as well as German and Dutch interests.[75] Russia, on its part, was strengthening its influence in northeast Prussia along the Afghan border. This made Britain uneasy. Britain also suspected Russia of extending its influence into the neutral zone. The problem before the British government was complicated by the fact that it was not willing to acquire more territory. As Grey stated: 'The weakness of our position in Persia is that the Russians are prepared to occupy Persia, and we are not. We wish Persia to be a neutral buffer state, they are willing to partition it.'[76] There were several reasons for this. A policy of absorption, if successful, would have resulted in a co-terminous frontier between Britain and Russia, a contingency never welcomed at London. The questions relating to Persia were discussed between Grey and Sazanov at Balmoral in September 1912. There, Grey did mention that if Russia interfered in the north, Britain would have to introduce a British-officered force in the south.[77] But, given knowledge of the constraints before Britain, Grey knew that this was an empty threat. Sazanov suggested the construction of a trans-Persian railway network. This suggestion caused discomfort in London as well as Delhi because this would have linked the Russian railway network directly to the Indian railway networks, a prospect that had never been welcomed. Thereafter, the talks were discontinued. In any case,

there was the problem of finding financial resources. The government of India had always been reluctant to contribute. Morley had sought to enlarge the basis of support for the Raj by associating some sections of the Indian population with the administration of the country, but Indian leaders were unhappy with this dose of 'liberalisation'. This made Morley reluctant to work for sustaining the constitutional government in Persia. His argument was that it would be very easy, and not unreasonable, for Indian politicians to ask why they should pay for the establishment in Persia of a constitutional system strictly denied to themselves.[78]

In Tibet also, London wanted to nurture the entente by not sanctioning any policy that smacked of the Curzon–Brodrick line of interference.[79] In 1907, the Tashi Lama had visited India.[80] The government of India wanted to give 'three or four hundred rifles' to him as an 'indication of friendship'. London vetoed this proposal.[81] In February 1908, when the Tibetans paid the last instalment of the indemnity, London forced Calcutta to evacuate the Chumbi valley in spite of remonstrances from the government of India and in spite of the fact that the trade agreement as envisaged under the Anglo-Chinese Convention of 1906 had not been concluded.[82] During 'the reformist vigour' displayed by the Manchu dynasty, the Chinese sent an armed expedition to Tibet and occupied Lhasa in 1909. Thereupon, the Dalai Lama had moved southwards to India and was given shelter,[83] but the British government refused to interfere in Tibet. Grey merely urged Peking to respect Tibet's trade commitments to the British under earlier Anglo-Chinese Conventions.[84] Morley told the government of India in unambiguous terms that 'all the business of the Dalai Lama is to be in effect decided by the Foreign Office and the India Office here'.[85]

The year 1911 saw the Revolution in China and the fall of the Manchu dynasty. In the conditions of political instability this created, Russia saw an opportunity to strengthen its position in the outlying provinces of this vast empire. The British government was keen to maintain the entente and asked the government of India to preserve the *status quo* as defined.[86] Tibet and Mongolia strove to take advantage of the situation. The Dalai Lama approached both London and St Petersburg to get recognition for the independent status of Tibet.[87] The government of India wanted to take a positive stand so as to prevent him from turning to Russia,[88] but London remained disinclined to intervene. Soon, reports began reaching London and Delhi about Russia's initiatives. In October 1912, Russia signed a treaty with Mongolia in which the former agreed to support Mongol autonomy in return for extensive privileges there.[89] Four months later, there were reports that Tibet and Mongolia had signed a treaty, Article VI of which provided for 'mutual assistance against external and internal dangers'.[90] It was not clear whether the Dalai Lama had accepted this treaty,[91] but it seemed clear that Russia was trying to establish its influence to the north of India by working through Mongolia, thus overcoming the constraints imposed by the Anglo-Russian Convention. These reports seemed more ominous because the Amir of Afghanistan had not formally accepted the Convention of 1907. This could have prevented the British government from objecting to the establishment of contacts between Russia and Tibet through Afghanistan.

In this situation, many began to advocate a policy of establishing some influence in Tibet. These included Crewe at the India Office, J.N. Jordan at Peking and Hardinge, the Viceroy of India.[92] While the government of India wanted to acquire influence at Lhasa, it refused altogether to resort to military means. Hardinge wrote: 'Not only shall we have our hands full in all probability with operations in Persia but we shall more or less be committed to the indefinitely prolonged occupation of Tibet at immense cost without corresponding advantage.'[93] Ultimately, it was decided that the problem should be tackled through diplomacy. A conference was arranged at Simla to which representatives from the concerned countries – India, Russia, China and Tibet – were invited. The first meeting was held on 6 October 1913, and continued for more than a month. It was chaired by A.H. McMahon who had been associated with drawing the Indo-Tibetan boundary line. The purpose of the conference was to decide on the status of Tibet and to exclude Russia from Tibet. The British government proposed the creation of an autonomous outer Tibet, and an inner Tibet in which the Chinese would have larger control. In foreign policy, Tibet was to be restricted to relations with Britain and China only. A British commercial agent was to be stationed near Lhasa.[94]

McMahon was not able to secure the consent of either Tibet or China to these proposals.[95] But the stiffest opposition came from St Petersburg. Sazanov argued that the British were in effect proposing to establish a protectorate over Tibet.[96] He 'scoffed' at the British explanation that the function of their agent in Tibet would be purely commercial.[97] At this stage, the Russian government put its hand on a very sensitive chord. It suggested that it would accept the proposal to station a British agent in Tibet in return for the placement of a Russian agent at Herat to handle recurring local problems. This suggestion created acute resentment in London as well as Delhi. Herat had always been regarded as a very vital point for the defence of India. There were acrimonious exchanges between London and St Petersburg. The British government was so sensitive on matters relating to the security of India that Sazanov was told that excessive Russian demands would cause the Anglo-Russian accord to break down altogether.[98] Any agreement with Russia which could not ensure the security of India was of little use. In March 1914, Crewe asked the Governor-General of India for his opinion and suggestions regarding policy on the suppositions that the Anglo-Russian agreement was maintained or alternatively should be revised.[99]

This came in the background of a growing feeling in all European countries that the recovery of Russia was complete in European terms. In 1913, Russia had launched a 'big programme' of rearmament, which it was universally believed, would be completed by 1917.[100] This heightened nervousness in London. Russia was a friend, and any increase in Russia's power should have caused glad tidings in London. But this was not to be. The increase in the power of Russia together with Russia's diplomatic initiatives in Asia seemed to make the task of defending the Indian Empire even more formidable. Many ministers, the Foreign Office as well as diplomats in various European capitals, expressed

themselves in favour of courting Russia not just as a counterpoise to Germany but to prevent it from casting covetous eyes on the countries along the territorial arc of the Indian Empire.[101] Nicolson went to the heart of the matter:

> Russia especially could cause us extreme embarrassment, and, indeed, danger, in the Mid-East and on our Indian frontier, and it would be most unfortunate were we to revert to the state of things, which existed before 1904, and 1907.[102]

In April 1914, Russia suggested that there should be 'naval conversations' between London and St Petersburg along the lines of the Anglo-French 'conversations' of 1912. Grey was hesitant because the Radical wing of the party was likely to raise questions. But the Cabinet sanctioned the 'conversations' nevertheless. Some preliminary discussions took place at London. Sazanov communicated that he wanted questions relating to Persia, Tibet and naval collaborations to all be settled by early August 1914.[103] With increasing consciousness that 'the corner-stone of their foreign relations' should be Anglo-Russian friendship, that Russia was trying to strengthen its position in Persia and Afghanistan, that Britain did not have the means to thwart Russia's expansion, and that Russia had fully recovered, July 1914 was no time to adopt a policy antagonistic to Russia.

In fact, London tended to co-operate with St Petersburg even when it was not convinced of the righteousness of Russia's position. The Liman von Sanders affair is a case in point. In November 1913, a German military mission headed by General Liman von Sanders was put in command of a Turkish army corps at Constantinople. St Petersburg, fearing further increase in German influence, protested. The British Foreign Office did not think that Russia had a strong case. Besides, any protest from London was likely to prove embarrassing because an Englishman, Admiral Limpus, was already engaged in the task of restructuring the Turkish navy. But Russia had made it a point to test the entente, and the British did pull the chestnuts out of the fire for Russia. To mollify the British and the Russians, it was the German government which ultimately accepted a compromise under which von Sanders was 'promoted' to the rank of Inspector-General of the Turkish army and became too senior to command an army corps.[104]

Commenting on the state of Anglo-German relations during the pre-First World War period, historians have tended to argue that in European international relations there was perpetual talk of an impending war between Britain and Germany and that efforts made to negotiate on various issues had remained barren.[105] But, in fact, the period just before the war was one of détente in Anglo-German relations. Since Britain had been able to maintain its lead, the naval race seemed to be winding down. Discussions of the issue in the press became subdued.[106] Internally, the British government and the press were wrapped up in the Irish crisis. In Germany, in the elections of 1912, the Social Democrats had emerged as the largest single party and this had given a new dimension to the issue of risking a war.[107] In the economic sphere, the two countries were excellent

trading partners. Germany provided Britain's second best economic market. Further, the diplomacy of the two countries was influenced by fear of Russia. They collaborated during the Balkan Wars so as to prevent Austro-Russian confrontation. In January 1913, Grey wrote: 'Our relations with Germany have improved because Kiderlen worked for peace in the Balkan crisis and Jagow had done the same.'[108] In the colonial field, the two countries had carried on negotiations for the division of Portuguese colonies and had reached an agreement in August 1913 though, for various reasons, this was not formally accepted.[109] It is interesting that on 27 July 1914, Bethmann-Hollweg expressed readiness to sign this Convention. The two countries were able to reach an agreement even on the most sensitive issue of the Baghdad Railway. After 1903, some stretches of the railway had been built.[110] Thereafter, planning stagnated for some years, but Whitehall was convinced that the railway would be built and continued the efforts to ensure that the railway between Basra and the Persian Gulf was not built without Britain's consent. After prolonged negotiations, a treaty was signed with the Turkish government under which the latter accepted Britain's demand and in return Britain agreed to a 3 per cent increase in Turkish customs duties and recognition of Turkish sovereignty over Kuwait.[111] In 1914, a treaty was signed between Britain and Germany on this issue. It was the refusal of the Turks to settle the matter with Germany without an improvement in the financial conditions offered which prevented the implementation of the Anglo-German agreement on the Baghdad Railway.

The assassination and its aftermath

On 28 June 1914, Franz Ferdinand, heir to the throne of Austria, was assassinated at Sarajevo by a Bosnian high school student, Gavrilo Princip.[112] Within six weeks, this assassination led to an armageddon in which, over four years time, over twenty million persons – combatants and civilians – died. Events during these six weeks have been studied very extensively. Yet, many gaps remain.[113] Historians have not ceased to ask why this isolated act of terrorism led to the outbreak of a world war. Why did the machinery, which had worked in the past, fail in this instance? In the case of Britain, one has to confront even more troubling questions. On 4 August the British government declared war by sending an ultimatum to the German government. Britain was not attacked. Why did Britain's policy makers opt for war despite acute divisions within the ranks of the Liberal Party? Britain turned out to be the only country where holiday crowds expressed themselves in favour of war even before their government took the decision to join the war.[114] Why did Britons welcome the war with such enthusiasm?

A brief summary of events during these six weeks is attempted here.[115] Even contemporaries commented on the absence of mourning at Vienna, but the Austrian government did see, in this regicide, a direct threat to its survival. It immediately assumed that the conspiracy to murder the Archduke had been hatched in Serbia with the connivance of its government and officials. Serbia

had doubled in size during the Balkan Wars and was boldly supporting Bosnian irrendentists. The Austrian government decided to take energetic action in order to demonstrate its power, to weaken Pan-Slav nationalism and to eliminate the Serbian problem once and for all. It is noteworthy that the crowned heads of Britain and Russia and the President of France were not invited to Archduke Ferdinand's funeral. This could be the result of fear that they might exert a moderating influence on Hapsburg designs with regard to Serbia.[116] At the same time, the Austrian government was aware that Russia was likely to intervene on behalf of Serbia and that only Germany could hold Russia back. So immediately after the Archduke's funeral, Berchtold asked Berlin for support.

The German government decided to stand by its lone ally. It was very acutely aware of the decline in the power of the Hapsburgs as well as of the need to ensure the continuance of Austria-Hungary as a great power. It was never confident about Italy's support, despite the fact that Italy almost annually issued firm pledges of allegiance to the Triple Alliance, the last one as late as February 1914.[117] Moreover, the issue of Trieste was widening the gap between Austria and Italy. While the Triple Alliance was never cohesive, the Triple Entente seemed to be becoming more formidable. The efforts made by Germany to make up with Britain had not succeeded. Reports about the Anglo-Russian 'naval conversations' of April 1914 had heightened anxiety levels in Berlin. The German Chancellor saw this development as 'the last link in the chain of German encirclement'.[118] France was also engaged in enhancing its military strength. In 1913, a new law had been passed extending compulsory military service to three years. All this encouraged the feeling in Berlin that if war was to come it was better for it to come sooner than later. The result was that the German government responded positively to Berchtold's plea for help. Kaiser William II assured the Austrian government that it could count on 'Germany's full support' in the Balkans even if 'serious European complications' (read 'war') resulted.[119] He also added that Germany fully expected war with Russia and had made all preparations over the past few years with this in mind. While giving this 'blank cheque', the role of Italy was not mentioned. Nor was any attempt made, even subsequently, to ask the Russians to stand aside in this matter.

Vienna took its own time in delivering the ultimatum because the army units earmarked for mobilisation had already proceeded on 'harvest leave'. It was considered inadvisable to recall them.[120] It was on 23 July that Austria delivered the ultimatum to the Serbian government containing a very stiff list of demands. Amongst other things, Austria demanded that representatives of the Austro-Hungarian government should participate in the inquiry into the origins of the assassination plot as well as the suppression of subversive activities directed against Austria-Hungary. The Serbs were to send their reply within forty-eight hours. The text reached the European capitals the next day. The crucial importance of these demands was immediately recognised. Grey described the ultimatum as 'the most formidable document I have ever seen addressed by one state to another that was independent'.[121]

Russia was a country that had a great deal to gain in terms of military power

by postponement of conflict.[122] But, for Russia, the option of peace meant abandoning Serbia and all the gains made in the Balkans during the preceding half of the decade, watching the consolidation of the power of Austria and Germany in the region and facing the wrath of the Pan-Slavs in the Duma. It decided to stand by Serbia. When the ultimatum was delivered at Belgrade, the mood at St Petersburg was upbeat. The French president and the premier, Poincaré and Viviani, were on a state visit there. It is not clear what transpired between the political leaders, but French statesmen were very conscious of their immediate weakness *vis-à-vis* the Germans, as the introduction of the controversial three-year law made clear. The population of France was only 60 per cent that of Germany and the rate of its growth was discouraging. Even after the introduction of a three-year conscription law, in 1914 the French military strength remained 700,000 men in peace time and 3.5 million in war, while the corresponding figures for Germany were 800,000 and 3.8 million men.[123] The French government was also determined to preserve the Franco-Russian alliance of 1894 as it alone offered France security against Germany and hopes of recovering Alsace and Lorraine. So, it saw no reason to urge caution to St Petersburg; in fact, at a diplomatic reception on 21 July, before the ultimatum was delivered, Poincaré told the Austrian ambassador to Russia not to forget that Serbia had 'some very warm friends in the Russian people' and that 'Russia had an ally, France'.[124]

Serbia's reply was delivered on 25 July, just before the expiry of the time limit. It was conciliatory in tone, but some of the demands had been accepted with reservations. The demand relating to the association of Austria in the inquiry into the assassination plot was seen as unworthy of acceptance by a sovereign state. The Serbian government had foreseen that its reply would not be accepted, as is obvious from the fact that it ordered mobilisation three hours before the delivery of the reply to Vienna. On 28 July Austria declared war on Serbia and began by shelling Belgrade. Thereafter, events moved too fast for diplomats and the initiative passed increasingly into the hands of military men who had been trained to put a premium on rapid mobilisation.

The British government could not have remained indifferent to these developments on the continent. The Radicals in the Liberal Party had opposed the idea of war and had kept the nation aware of the possible costs of war. But the nation was also aware of the possible costs of staying away. On 6 July itself, Lichnowsky, who had returned to London after a short visit to Germany, had warned Grey that the Austrians intended to take strong measures and that Germany would support them. Subsequently, reports began to reach London of plans for a strong indictment of Serbia.[125] But the feeling at London generally was that another crisis was likely in the Near East. Perhaps, flattered by the success of efforts at mediation during the Balkan Wars, Grey began to give thought to the possibility of collaboration between the Great Powers. It was only after the text of the Austrian ultimatum reached London that the British government began to show signs of anxiety.

Throughout this crisis, those who charted Britain's foreign policy were

convinced of one thing – Britain would have to stand by France and Russia. As Zara Steiner also notes, Grey's strategy was to work with the German government 'as far as might be possible' without moving away from France and Russia.[126] As soon as Grey sensed that Germany might not restrain Austria, as it had done during the First Balkan War, he advised the Russian and Austrian governments to discuss the issue between themselves. Poincaré, who was in St Petersburg, and Sazanov suggested that the entente powers make a demonstration of entente solidarity by giving a warning to Vienna. Grey did not accept this suggestion for fear that it would alarm the Germans. After the ultimatum was delivered, Grey put forward the suggestion of holding a conference of the four powers which did not have direct interest in Serbia – Britain, France, Germany and Italy – to discuss the Serbian question.

This was the time when Britain seemed to be on the verge of a civil war on the question of Home Rule for Ireland. The Cabinet's attention was focused on this issue. The Cabinet had not discussed foreign policy for a month. Grey had discussed the matter only with Asquith, Haldane and Churchill because he did not want to involve 'the pacifist brigade' of the Cabinet. It was in the Cabinet meeting of 24 July, at the close of discussions on Ulster, that he brought up the Serbian crisis. The Cabinet approved of the proposal for a four-power mediation. Thereafter the ministers, including the Foreign Minister, scattered for the weekend. Meanwhile, the Admiralty took precautionary steps. On 17–18 July, a grand review of the whole fleet had been held at Spithead. On 26 July, Churchill took the decision not to demobilise the fleet which had assembled there. Grey, who was informed in the evening, approved of the decision. They decided also to publicise the decision. The aim was to assure the French and the Russians and to warn the Germans.[127] Over the weekend, though the prospect of civil war in Ireland drew closer, the attention of ministers remained riveted on Europe. It was on 27 July that the full Cabinet devoted itself to the question of Britain participating in the war in case France was attacked by Germany. In this meeting, five ministers made it clear that they would resign if the government took the decision in favour of war.[128] It seemed that divisions within the Cabinet on this issue could lead to the fall of the Liberal government and to political instability at a decisive moment, when Europe stood on the brink of war. The Cabinet, however, took the decision that a 'precautionary' period be initiated by despatching warning telegrams to all naval, military and colonial stations.[129] On this very day, the Germans rejected Britain's proposal for a four-power conference. On 28 July 1914, Austria declared war on Serbia. With this, all prospects of peaceful negotiations between Vienna and St Petersburg ended.

The decision to enter the war

On 29 July 1914, a meeting of the Cabinet was held to discuss the situation from all points of view in the event of a war between the Great Powers. A prolonged discussion was held. Ultimately, no decision was taken. John Burnes summed up thus: 'It was decided not to decide.'[130] The majority of the members took the

view that both the French and the Germans be told that the British government was unable to pledge itself in advance, 'either under all conditions to stand aside or in any condition to go in'.[131] By this time, the question of Belgian neutrality had also come up. It was known for a long time that German war plans were based on the movement of a German army through Belgium. The Treaty of 1839 guaranteeing the neutrality of Belgium had implied that if any guarantor state infringed that neutrality, each of the others could claim a right, and in some circumstances a duty, to resist that infringement.[132] During the prewar decade, the Belgian government had kept outside the European alliance system and had repeatedly stressed its adherence to the strictest neutrality, so much so that in July 1914 it refused to the last to ask any country for support. In the meeting of 27 July the Cabinet had postponed the question of taking a decision on this issue. On 29 July the Cabinet decided that if the matter arose, the decision would be one of policy rather than legal obligation. But Grey warned Lichnowsky privately that if Germany and France became involved in war, for Britain, 'it would not be practicable to stand aside and wait for any length of time'.[133]

On 29 July, shortly before midnight, Bethmann-Hollweg suggested to Goschen at Berlin a neutrality agreement in which, in return for Britain's neutrality, he offered a guarantee of independence of the Netherlands and a promise not to undertake 'territorial gains at the expense of France'. Grey refused to accept, what he described as a 'shameful proposal'.[134] On 31 July, long before Germany demanded the right of German troops to cross Belgian territory, Grey asked both the French and German governments whether they would be prepared to respect the neutrality of Belgium as long as no other power violated it. The French replied in the affirmative while the Germans remained non-committal.[135] By this time, Russia had decided to support Serbia unequivocally. On the afternoon of 30 July the Tsar had signed the *ukazes* announcing general mobilisation. On 1 August Germany formally declared war on Russia. Under the terms of the Franco-Russian Alliance, this meant that France was obliged to enter the war and all European powers knew that this would result in an immediate attack by Germany on France. Every well-informed observer knew also that the German attack on France would involve the questions of the violation of the neutrality of Belgium and, hence, of Britain's entry into the war.

In this situation, the decision about Britain's attitude to the war could no longer be postponed. This question had no relation to the size or effectiveness of the expeditionary force. It had always been accepted that, by continental standards, the British army was 'contemptibly small'. In fact, on 2 August, Grey himself had said to the French ambassador that sending two or even four divisions at the beginning of a war would 'entail the maximum of risk and produce the minimum of effect'.[136] There were no war plans for using even this force effectively. Britain's naval and military plans had remained ambiguous because, until August 1914, the Cabinet had not formally decided whether, in the event of a European war, Britain would stand by France, and if it did so, whether it would fight purely a maritime war or commit its expeditionary force to the continent. Even in his speech of 3 August, Grey had told the Commons that there

was no commitment to send an Expeditionary Force to France.[137] This had forced the strategists to work in a vacuum. The military chiefs were anxious to play a major role on the continent, but they did not have enough troops to do so or even plans to raise them. The Admiralty had the plan to blockade Germany, but had omitted to assess Germany's vulnerability to a blockade. It was only in March 1914 that an inter-departmental committee had been established to work out plans to ship the expeditionary force. This Committee had presented its report only on 30 July, and did not decide on sending troops inevitably to France because many Cabinet ministers were opposed to it.[138] Even after Britain joined the war, the General Staff remained unable to fix 'the decisive place' where the British force would land. Debate continued as to whether it should land at Antwerp, Amiens or Maubeuge, and over how many divisions should go. Ultimately, the expeditionary force was sent not because it existed, but because the entente existed and because Britain wanted it to remain.

During the last week of July, in his parleys with the French and German ambassadors, Grey had referred repeatedly to his fears that public opinion would not support intervention.[139] But Britain turned out to be the only country where holiday crowds expressed themselves vociferously in favour of war even before the government took the decision for war. Ramsay MacDonald, at that time chairman of the Parliamentary Labour Party, who travelled to Downing Street on 2 August, told Morley that 'it would be the most popular war the country had ever fought'.[140] People not only went willingly to war, they maintained their enthusiasm even after the terrible battles up until 1915. This was a result of what James Joll described as 'the mood of 1914'.[141] A recent study of depiction of military force and 'imagery' employed to convey the idea of war in Edwardian newspapers has shown that, like their counterparts on the continent, Britons were also fed on ideas centring on 'glorification of war', 'blessing of war', 'survival of the fittest race' and war as a necessary antidote to 'a world grown old, cold and weary'. Even advertisers utilised the imagery of the redemptive quality of war for a nation suffering from 'fatty degeneration'.[142] War was seen as an acceptable method of settling differences between nations and of maintaining the country's standing in the world. The belief in the need for empire was widespread and the empire was seen as beneficial to decadent and lethargic Britain. The study emphasises that it was not a minority view held by old men and military experts. It was there in newspapers written for readers from myriad social backgrounds.[143]

However, Britain joined the war not because of public sentiments but because Britain's interests required the government to do so. At every stage, Britain's policy makers chose their options carefully. On 2 August, early in the morning, German troops crossed into Luxemburg. In the Cabinet meeting held on this day, questions surrounding the defence of France's northern coast and of Britain's attitude in the case of violation of neutrality of Belgium were taken up. By this time, it seemed that the Cabinet had come near to parting of ways. Grey insisted on the government taking a decisive stand, but he did not place before his colleagues the considerations that had convinced him of the necessity of

taking the step on which he was insisting.[144] According to J.A. Pease, Grey simply presented the Cabinet with the alternative of his resignation.[145] Asquith informed the waverers that he would stand by Grey in any event.[146] The ministers showed greater concern about the effects of their resignation on continuation of power in the hands of the Liberal Party. Ultimately, the Cabinet decided that 'a substantial violation' of Belgium's neutrality would compel the government to take action. By this time, the number of 'ministerial irreconcilables' had reduced to two: John Burns, who resigned that day, and Morley, who did so the next day.

The decision to join the war in case the neutrality of Belgium was violated was thus reached before the intentions of the Belgian government were clear. Without an invitation from the Belgian government, any intervention could be interpreted not as an attempt to uphold Belgium's status under the treaties, but as a further infringement of its neutrality. Even at the time of the Agadir crisis, the Committee of Imperial Defence had expressed concern about this state of affairs.[147] Relations between Britain and Belgium had been far from cordial. The British had been far too prominent in protesting about the Belgian Congo to be at all popular in Belgium. In 1912, when the British government had made an attempt to resume Anglo-Belgian staff talks, it had been rebuffed.[148] By 1914, Belgium did not think of Britain as a reliable and disinterested protector. In these circumstances, even if the right to intervene without an invitation could be established, there was the danger of appearing more Belgian than the Belgians. However, on 3 August, much to the relief of the British government, King Albert of Belgium finally appealed to King George V for diplomatic support. Thereafter, the whole tempo of decision making changed.[149]

Having decided to take action in case Germany violated the neutrality of Belgium, what remained to be determined were the grounds on which the decision should be advertised. It was necessary to find a way of presenting the government's position in an acceptable manner because people would not identify themselves with an aggressive and provocative policy. They would support only a defensive war in national interests. On 3 August, Grey was to meet the French ambassador. He was advised merely to 'allude' to unspecified British interests. The Cabinet meeting on this day was devoted to working out the details of Grey's speech in the House of Commons. His speech in the afternoon was extraordinarily effective. He appealed to the individual conscience of each member. Carefully choosing aspects that would appeal to different listeners, he reviewed relations with France highlighting informal, moral obligations and referred to the question of Belgium, all in a fumbling tone.[150] He did not refer to the interests at stake or to the entente with Russia.

On 4 August, the German army crossed into Belgium. The information reached London at mid-day. At 2 pm, Grey, probably after consultation with Asquith, sent an ultimatum asking the Germans to withdraw their demands on Belgium and to respect Belgian neutrality. He also added that unless reply was received by midnight, Britain would be obliged to take 'all steps in their power necessary to uphold the neutrality of Belgium'.[151] There was no German reply

to the ultimatum. At 11 pm (midnight in Berlin), Churchill despatched action telegrams to the fleet at Scapa Flow, Cromarty and Rosyth and thus declared war against Germany. The Belgian issue enabled the government to cloak its final decision in moral terms. It provided the waverers in the government and Parliament with a perfect justification for their *volte face*. It helped to convince their countrymen that they must join the struggle against aggressive and bullying powers.[152]

One has still to explain why Britain joined the war. Despite continuing efforts to establish friendly relations with Germany and some success in eliminating points of conflict in some sectors, it was clear that Britain would not join the war on the side of Germany. At least for a decade, the government, the bureaucracy and the press had attributed hegemonic designs to Germany and identified it as the eventual, even inevitable, antagonist in any future war. This left Britain with the choice of either staying out or of joining the war on the side of France and Russia. The issue is generally seen in terms of a German victory, and not in terms of victory for the Franco-Russian combine. It is argued that if Britain had remained neutral and Germany had been victorious, the balance of power on the continent would have been destroyed and Germany would have become all-powerful in Europe. Britain could not afford to stand by and let a strong naval and military power like Germany overrun France and establish control over the southern coast of the Channel. Historians have tended to argue that it was for this very reason that Britain had to stand by France and Russia. Steiner comments: 'War was not acceptable but it was thinkable. And it was preferable to living beside a German-dominated continent subject to its military rule.'[153] But the issue of the consequences of Britain's standing aloof has to be viewed in the context of Britain's relations with its entente partners also. Britain had to side with them for reasons for which the ententes had been made. If Britain stayed out, either defeat or victory for France and Russia would have spelled disaster for Britain's standing in the world. In the case of defeat, it was believed that Russia would have tried to secure redress by expanding towards its southeast, towards Britain's Indian Empire. Even in 1905, when Russia was defeated by Japan, British strategists had expressed such fears. In the scenario where Britain stayed neutral and Russia was victorious, the latter was likely to do the same to take revenge on Britain. All Europe had recognised that the empire formed the basis of Britain's great power status and that the Indian Empire formed Britain's Achilles' heel. The entente was seen as necessary because Britain did not want to cross swords with Russia in that region, and it was honoured in 1914 for the same reason. Bertic had written from Paris in 1912: 'Should Russia be dragged into a war with Austria and Germany and should we stand aloof, the Entente will die a natural death and no power on earth will bring it to life again.'[154] Less than two days before Britain joined the war, Buchanan wrote from St Petersburg:

> if we do not respond to the Tsar's appeal for our support we shall, at the end of the war, whatever be its issue, find ourselves without a friend in Europe, while our Indian Empire will no longer be secure from attack by Russia. If

> we defer intervention till France is in danger of being crushed, the sacrifices we shall then be called upon to make will be much greater.[155]

If the British government did not have the option to join Germany, it did not even have the option of staying aloof. It could not consider any alternative, the consequence of which would be a relinquishment of control over India. This would have been tantamount to demonstrating that Britain was no longer a great power.

In discussing the July crisis, Grey has been depicted as a 'fumbling', 'hesitant' and 'indecisive' foreign minister afflicted with a sense of helplessness who 'seems not to have understood the full significance of Russian mobilisation', who encouraged Bethmann-Hollweg to gamble on his 'ultimate neutrality'.[156] These are extremely harsh allegations against a statesman who was extremely consistent in his handling of foreign policy. On coming to office, he staked everything on maintaining the entente with France and forming one with Russia. Thereafter, he devoted himself to pulling the ententes through. During the negotiations carried on with Germany, Grey did not entertain any suggestion that could have adverse repercussions on Britain's relations with its entente partners. During 1907–14, the possibility of conflict in the Near East was envisaged often, and each time British statesmen and diplomats came across impediments in the way of co-operating with Russia. Yet they opted for a policy of co-operation with Russia because they did not want to alienate Russia and France. Goschen called this 'a perfect beast of a problem' for Britain and elaborated:

> If Russia moves against Austria, Germany will join the latter. Then of course France must also chip in…But, where should we be if we were to stand aloof? I shudder to think of it. What friends should we have left? and…all our old anxiety, which we set at rest by our Ententes, brought to life again. It is really rather awful to think of it.[157]

In January 1914, when Sazanov warned that if England failed to support Russia over another Balkan issue 'there would be an end to our understanding', Grey wrote to Goschen that he did not think that it was worth all the fuss Sazanov was making on this issue, 'but as long as he does make a fuss it will be important and very embarrassing to us: for we can't turn our back upon Russia'.[158] In his annual report on Russia for the year 1913, which was received in London in March 1914, Buchanan wrote: 'It is useless for us to blind our eyes to the fact that, if we are to remain friends with Russia, we must be prepared to give her our material as well as moral support in any conflict in which she becomes involved in Europe.'[159] The summer of 1914 was no time to alienate Russia. On issues relating to Tibet, Afghanistan and Persia, Britain had seen that, though Russia's reaction was curt, Britain was in no position to take a confrontationist stance. While Britain's resources to defend the Indian Empire had remained inadequate, Russia seemed to be gradually becoming stronger.

In the July crisis the British government merely continued the policy it had

followed all along. Throughout July, Grey did not make any effort to mediate between Russia and Austria because comradeship between them in Europe did not suit Britain. The day after Serbia rejected the ultimatum, Buchanan telegraphed from St Petersburg:

> We shall have to choose between giving Russia our active support or renouncing her friendship. If we fail her now we cannot hope to maintain that friendly co-operation with her in Asia that is of such vital importance to us.[160]

At the end of July 1914 it was accepted at the Foreign Office that an understanding with Russia was 'essential to our interests as an Empire', that Russia was 'the one Power with whom it is our paramount duty to cultivate cordial relations' and that Russia was 'rapidly becoming so powerful that we must retain her friendship at almost any cost'.[161] This was the reason why Asquith also told the King on 28 July that if Britain did not support Russia, Russia would find Britain's friendship valueless.[162] This was the reason why Nicolson could speak to Balfour, 'as if it were a matter of course that we should join in at once with France and Russia'.[163] Steiner also takes notice that Grey never intended to abandon his friends.[164] The decision to stand by Russia and France stemmed not only from commitments undertaken under the ententes, obligation to defend the neutrality of Belgium, from a desire to be in *less beaux yeux de Serbie* and from a desire to prevent German domination of Europe, but also from the compulsion to be on the side of Russia for maintaining the Raj.

During the last days of peace, Grey opted not to spell out Britain's position. Far from being an example of 'innocence or stupidity',[165] Grey's attitude was an outcome of well-considered judgement. This stemmed from two factors. One was that he shuddered to think of the impact of war on the economy. The Committee of Imperial Defence had appointed a sub-committee which had interviewed financial leaders of the City and had concluded that an Anglo-German war would be calamitous and ruinous.[166] The second and more immediate reason was that there was certain to be strident opposition to the decision to join the war and more so to that of joining on the side of Russia from the majority in the Cabinet and three-fourths of the Liberal MPs.[167] The Conservative leadership had expressed itself in favour of co-operating in the war effort but, for Asquith and Grey, it was the backing of their own party that was of crucial importance. Ponsonby became particularly active in mobilising anti-war forces, and arranged a meeting of his Foreign Affairs Group daily during the last three days of July. Grey requested him to keep his group quiet for a week on the assurance that he was working for peace.[168]

Outside the Parliament, Radical leaders of the Liberal Party – Graham Wallas and Norman Angell – had formed their Neutrality Committee and Neutrality League respectively on 28 July. On 31 July the Cabinet had rejected Churchill's proposal that reserves be called out. Morley and Simon claimed that their anti-war views were shared by industrial centres in the north and the

banking and commercial authorities in London. Kier Hardie, chairman of the *International*, issued a manifesto against war. On 1 August, Asquith reported that the Cabinet had come 'near to the parting of ways'.[169] With the advantage of hindsight, it is easy to see that men were not really divided into pro-war and anti-war camps, but at that time it seemed clear that the idea of fighting alongside Russia would be bitterly opposed. This could be the reason why Grey, who was convinced of the need to support Russia, avoided making any attempt to convince his colleagues about the appropriatness of the policy that the government wanted to adopt. In the long and very crucial Cabinet meeting of 2 August, too, to secure the consent of his colleagues, he threatened to resign, thus making the decision to join the war a question of politics rather than of policy. This has been described as the most striking feature of the British Cabinet's decision for war.[170] He raised the question of commitment to defend the northern coast of France, but not that of compulsion to co-operate with Russia. Keith Wilson rightly comments that Grey's silence about Russia during the last days of peace 'becomes silence most eloquent'.[171]

In his speech in Parliament on 3 August, amongst other things, Grey said that the country would suffer a little more if it went into war than if it stayed out. This was not said because of anxiety about the defence of the British Isles, which were separated from the continent by the Channel and where Britain had been able to maintain its naval supremacy. It was Britain's vulnerability on the Indian frontier that must have been at the back of his mind. He also urged Britain to stand by its entente partners. This made him a symbol of Britain's determination to fight the war second only to Kitchener.[172] And, in all this, concern for empire was an important ingredient. Zara Steiner describes Britain as 'the weary titan' which was 'beginning to feel her age'. About Britain's decision to enter the war, Steiner says:

> Just as the Germans, in their eagerness to capitalise on their burgeoning strength, followed an erratic, over-ambitious and unnecessarily aggressive course, so the British, fearful of losing what they had, sought to tighten their defences.[173]

Empire had always been a very powerful constituent of Britons' self-perception as a great power. What Britain feared to lose, above all, was its empire, and the place of India in this empire is implicit in the imagery most often used, that of 'the jewel in the crown'. Thus the reasons why Britain entered the war in August 1914 have much to do with this determination to retain their *Koh-i-noor*.

9 Conclusion

In this age of empire, Britain did not perceive any threat to its own security or integrity from any country. There were only a few fleeting and groundless invasion scares from France. Russia was certainly perceived as a rival throughout, but it lacked a strong navy and was therefore not in a position to pose any threat to Britain. Germany's decision to build a navy did create apprehensions centring on the security of the British Isles. But the British government and people showed determination to maintain their superior position and were able to do so.

At the beginning of the period covered in this work Britain possessed territories and interests in every part of the globe. In Britain's empire, the Indian Empire was unique due to its vast scale and human and material resources. Ever since parts of India passed under the British during the second half of the eighteenth century, the issue of control over the empire in India was regarded as non-negotiable. The British people at all levels looked upon the possession of India as a very important constituent of the identity of their nation as a great power. Policy makers remained conscious that India was not just a piece, or even the king or queen, on the diplomatic chessboard and that, whatever the costs and risks, the Raj had to be maintained. During 'the age of high imperialism', in which the dominant perception was that empire was desirable, that it conferred great benefits, in fact greatness itself, on a nation, it was taken for granted in Britain as well as in all European countries, that loss of India would be a great blow to Britain. On this issue, the empirical evidence is compelling. In fact, when centrality of the Indian factor in determining Britain's diplomatic and strategic priorities is taken note of, it becomes easier not only to place Britain's relations with other European states in their proper perspective but also to understand how Britain's imperial designs came to be tacked on to the Near East, the Middle East, Africa and South-East Asia.

The continuance, on the continent, of peace, status quo and balance of power served Britain's interests perfectly. Such a situation provided not only security to Britain but also ensured that the British were left in unmolested enjoyment of their vast and splendid possessions. They did not gain anything by being quarrelsome. Salisbury's oft-quoted comment, 'whatever happens will be for the worse and therefore it is in our interests that as little should happen as possible' expressed this basic truism.[1] But, in this respect, two points have to be borne in

mind. First, Britain did not have the resources to ensure peace or status quo on the continent. British statesmen remained conscious that ships sailing on the sea could not stop armies on land, that they could not operate against continental powers except under the wings of a military ally and also that they did not have the resources to meet Russia in superior force to defend the Raj. Second, things would not, and did not, stand still. This created problems. Russia continued to expand towards its south-east, so much so that by 1895 the Russian Empire and the British Empire were separated by a very narrow strip of territory which the British very insistently and calculatingly placed under Afghan sovereignty. Other European countries too began to acquire colonies, and since Britain owned the biggest empire, it felt threatened everywhere. Moreover, resentment against alien rule began to spread. This became a matter of concern for Britain in India, West Asia, the Balkans and Africa.

It was accepted contemporaneously that the two hegemons and rivals of the nineteenth century were Britain and Russia. To explain this rivalry contemporaries as well as historians have laid emphasis on ideological incompatibilities between autocratic Russia and liberal Britain. But these were not the causes of enmity. Britain looked upon Russia as an enemy because Russia seemed to have the resources as well as the will to threaten the Raj and the routes thereto. In the quest for a warm water coast, Russia's mission had been to reach the Mediterranean. This created, for the British, the sceptre of entrenchment of a powerful rival on the most efficient route to the Orient, which was of particular importance to Britain because of the desire to maintain control over India. Simultaneously, Russia's expansion in Central Asia was seen as a threat to the frontiers of India. Britain keenly watched all developments in the Balkan region, and despite professions of 'isolationism', became active whenever Russia tended to acquire stronger position. Here Britain could have the support and sympathy of many of the European powers because they had interests in questions centring on Constantinople, the Danube region and the Mediterranean coast. In concert with the powers, who possessed strong armies, Britain could take care of its interests, as happened during the Near Eastern crisis of 1875–8 and the Bulgarian crisis of 1885–7.

In Central Asia, Britain found itself helpless. The continental powers were not generally interested in checking Russia's expansion in this region. Britain worked to ensure the security of its Indian Empire by keeping other European powers, especially Russia, off not only the frontiers of India but off all states along the territorial rim of the Indian Empire. The problem could be solved if Britain could ensure the goodwill and co-operation of these states. But Britain's efforts to do so in Afghanistan and Persia did not bear fruit. Britain took seriously reports of Russia's manipulations even in Tibet, which was known as 'the Forbidden Land'. An expedition was duly sent there in 1903. French expansion in the direction of India from South-East Asia also did not go unchallenged, but France was vulnerable to Britain's navy and hence Britain was in a position to handle any threat from France. In Central Asia, Russia was not vulnerable to Britain's naval pressure. British statesmen and strategists broadly considered two

strategies to stall Russia's advance in the direction of India. One consisted of meeting Russia in superior force on the northwest of the Indian Empire, and the other of cutting Russia's underbelly by an attack through the Black Sea. But, as seen in this book, for giving practical shape to the former strategy, Britain did not seem to possess the human and material resources, and for adopting the latter, Britain could not get diplomatic support from the central powers.

For these reasons, despite talk of 'isolation' and all admitted suspicions and antagonisms between Britain and Russia, settlement with Russia seemed preferable to the arduous policy of seeking to isolate Russia diplomatically or facing it militarily. Britain made persistent efforts to reach accommodation with Russia. Contemporaries worked for it and historians take note of it though, generally, the latter stop short of explaining why an accommodation with Russia was considered so important. Eyre Crowe, who emerged as one of the most influential officials of the Foreign Office and who claimed that he watched 'every single negotiation or interchange of views with Russia', found Britain's attitude 'abjectly servile'. In October 1902 he wrote: 'The number of times we have in recent years made direct overtures ... for the purpose of having a friendly understanding is greater than you can think possible. The answers are always studied insults.'[2] In 1905 when the feeling of helplessness on the issue of defending the Raj against Russia was at its peak, George Clarke also wrote: 'History of our relations with Russia is an amazing one. It will have to be written some day.'[3] The desire to maintain friendly relations with Russia made the Anglo-Russian entente of 1907 extremely important for Britain. Despite active opposition from a majority of the ministers, the Liberal governments of Campbell-Bannerman and Asquith made every effort to be accommodating to Russia. But on issues that touched the Raj, Britain was not ready for any compromise. Britain remained adamant on the issue of keeping the Straits 'closed' and remonstrated strongly when Russia made suggestions about having an agent at Herat.

Britain's desire to ensure its hold over the Indian Empire decisively influenced Britain's relations with the other European powers as well. The League of Three Emperors of Russia, Germany and Austria-Hungary remained Britain's nightmare throughout this period. Why did Whitehall become perturbed by the revival of the Dreikaisersbund, the Bjorko Meeting of July 1905 or the Potsdam Conversations during 1910? Ideological suspicion of conservative monarchical governments does not sufficiently explain the intensity of concern. One reason for dreading *bonhomie* amongst these three powers was that because of geographical location, this combination had direct bearing on the security of India. Friendship between these three powers could free Russian forces from the Polish border. On the contrary, if relations between Russia and the central powers remained strained, Russia would have to divide its resources and efforts between its Western and Central Asian frontier, thus relieving Britain of much anxiety. Similarly, Britain courted the Triple Alliance from the time it was formed in 1882. Broadly speaking, two reasons for this have been advanced. First, for managing the affairs of Egypt, Britain needed the majority of votes on the

International Debt Commission. Since France had bitterly resented the unilateral occupation of Egypt by Britain, Britain depended on the Triple Alliance for securing a majority on this Commission. Second, Britain wanted the Alliance's support against Russia's expansion in the Balkans. While these considerations were important, the compulsion to defend the Indian Empire also entered the calculations. For resorting to the Black Sea strategy of putting pressure on Russia, Britain needed to send its fleet through the straits, and permission from the Ottoman ruler was needed for this purpose. Only the friendly attitude of Germany could make the Ottomans take a stand against Russia. In 1885, at the time of the Penjdeh crisis, Bismarck was able to prevail upon the Ottomans not to grant such permission. Moreover, if a fleet was sent in that direction, France could attack it from the rear. Again, Only Germany could prevent France from doing so. The Franco-Russian alliance was seen as the worst combination against Britain. While French money could enable Russia to build railways in Central Asia, thus obliterating the distance between the two empires, the French navy could prevent Britain from sending reinforcements to India from Britain. Thus, at no stage was it possible for Britain to isolate itself from European affairs. The need to ensure continued control over the Indian Empire decisively influenced Britain's relations with all European countries.

From this study of the Indian factor in Britain's foreign policy, some reflections might tentatively be offered on some related issues. It has already been said that Britain stood to gain by continuation of the status quo, not only in Europe but also globally. Britain opposed even the construction of the Suez Canal. Whenever this status quo was threatened, Britain became active. It showed that it had the resources, the technology, the industrial capacity and, above all, the will to maintain its pre-eminent position. When the scramble for Africa started, Britain not only participated but also ended up a dominant power in Africa. In 1882, Gladstone's government occupied Egypt and defended it on the grounds that it was necessary to ensure control over the route to the East. Subsequently, in order to maintain control over Egypt, Britain swallowed the entire region up to the source of the Nile, southwards from Egypt and westwards from the eastern coast of Africa. Britain remained concerned about control over the Cape route. In the rest of Africa too, Britain brought the most valuable parts under its wings. To provide security to the eastern frontier of India against French intrigues, Britain annexed Upper Burma in 1886 and worked to create a buffer state further east in Siam. To strengthen its position on the northwest frontier of India, Britain absorbed Baluchistan and Chitral. When Germany's decisions to create an empire, to build a navy, to expand in the Near East together with Kaiser William II's provocative references to *weltpolitik*, seemed to demonstrate Germany's desire to alter the status quo, Britain showed a determination to stay ahead. By maintaining its naval supremacy even after the construction of the *Dreadnought*, Britain demonstrated that it was not ready to accept any alteration in the ranking of powers. In the diplomatic field, Britain, on the whole, followed a policy of accommodation and deterrence. Britain remained fearful of the cost and wider implications of a large-scale conflict. Yet, Britain showed a determina-

tion to defend the nation's perceived interests. In 1914, Britain did not seriously consider the option of staying neutral. Britain joined the war not only because it could have resulted in German victory, and hence German predominance on the continent, but also because Britain could not afford to antagonise Russia by standing aloof. Either of the results – success or defeat for Russia – could have spelled disaster for Britain's position as a global power because, in each case, Russia was likely to turn towards the north-west of the Indian Empire where Britain did not have the means to defend it.

One question raised in this context is, did India distort British Foreign Policy? M.E. Chamberlain, who raises this question in this form, concludes that Britain was a European power and, on the whole, responded to the balance of power considerations on the continent.[4] P.J. Marshall also comments: 'The conclusion that Britain's political leadership has rarely been willing to allow the supposed needs of the Empire to impose significant changes on Britain, seems inescapable.'[5] In fact, many accounts of British foreign policy do not breathe a word about the Indian Empire, and in these the question of influencing or 'distorting' British foreign policy does not come up. Whether India 'distorted' or 'determined' British foreign policy depends on one's perception of the nature of the Indian connection. But, as has been argued in this book, the total commitment to retain control over India formed the unceasing assumption behind all foreign policy decisions, at times spoken but often unspoken. Foreign policy revolved around a strategic focus. In an age when no danger was envisaged to the security of Great Britain and its Great Power status had to be retained, British policy focused a great deal on guarding the Raj, the omphalos of the empire.

It has been a matter of debate amongst historians as to whether there was consensus across different political parties and individuals as to what Britain's foreign policy should be. But support for the policy of ensuring continued political control over the Indian Empire cut across ideological, political and class spectrums. Concern for the defence of Britain's possessions transcended particular political interests and groups and entered the sphere reserved for matters of national interest. It has often been argued that Parliament was concerned with the costs of the empire rather than with any glories it might bring to the Crown.[6] Parliament did want to execute its strategy of retaining Britain's imperial position on the cheap. A constant stream of cost-cutters were always a part of Britain's political scene. But whenever any threat was perceived to the Indian Empire, irrespective of remoteness, triviality or irrationality, the reaction in favour of retaining the Indian Empire was instantaneous and vociferous. Whether it was the French effort to open a consulate in Rangoon, or defeat of an Afghan army near the remote Afghan frontier at Penjdeh, or German plans for a railway up to Baghdad or the visit of a Russian monk to Lhasa, any threat to India galvanised the British government, Parliament and the nation. Parliament and the people did not hesitate even when the price for defending India had to be paid in monetary terms. In fact, the House of Commons tended to give sanction for demands placed by the government so readily that often the

ministers were nonplused. To recall just a few instances, this happened in 1875 when funds were needed for the visit of the Prince of Wales to India, in 1878 during the Russo-Turkish War, in 1882 at the time of the expedition to Egypt, in 1884 for the expedition to Sudan, in 1885 in connection with the Penjdeh incident, in 1896 when a loan had to be arranged for Egypt, and in 1898 at the time of the Fashoda crisis. So unique was India's position within the British Empire that even 'the devoutest Little Englander' – Gladstone – was ready to applaud the government's policies there. One reason, of course, was that India underwrote all administrative costs – from ensuring a splendid lifestyle for those at the top level to paying the wages of the charwoman at the India Office.

Historians have talked of the bifurcate nature of British foreign policy, of an inherent contradiction in demands placed upon foreign policy between those who viewed Great Britain primarily as a European power and those driven by the assumption of Britain as a global power. The entire argument in this book, however, is that there was no such bifurcation. The aim of foreign policy was to maintain the nation's status as a great power. The relations with the European powers and worldwide concerns were the co-joint expressions of maintaining that status. It might almost be said that the *raison d'être* of Britain's foreign policy and strategy was to deny to the European powers the levers which might be used to prise the imperial structure apart. Britain did not tolerate any infringement by any European power either in the states bordering their Indian Empire or along the lanes that linked London with Calcutta and Bombay. It is significant that as Britain strengthened its hold over Egypt, 'the Constantinople or Cairo' controversy started. The issue was not whether the British should try to have control over the core or the periphery of the Ottoman Empire. The issue was, which of the two alternatives would enable Britain to control the route to India better. In the end, until 1914 Britain stuck to the policy of bolstering Turkey and retaining control over Egypt. In fact, the determination to retain control over the Indian Empire decisively influenced the choices made. When Disraeli purchased shares of the Suez Canal, when he collaborated with Germany and Austria in 1878, when he occupied Cyprus, when he tried to work for improvement in the conditions of the Armenian Christians, when his government decided to invade Afghanistan; when Gladstone conquered Egypt, when he sent the expedition to Sudan, when, in 1885, he asked Parliament to grant money to fight Russia; when Salisbury signed the Mediterranean agreements, when he exchanged Heligoland with Zanzibar and other areas in East Africa; when Rosebery decided 'to be with the Triple Alliance but not of it', when an expedition was sent to Fashoda; when Balfour formed the Anglo-French entente, when the Liberals formed the entente with Russia, in fact, even when Britain decided to stand by France and Russia in 1914, an important ingredient was the uninfringeable will to hold on to India.

British statesmen presented their foreign policy in a warm moral and altruistic jacket. Speeches and statements of all managers of British foreign policy are replete with such sentiments. This is understandable. It did matter to them how their policies were perceived by their electorates, and for this reason it was

important for them to present these in terms of moral principles. But public and private statements made for this purpose cannot be taken as real motives. It is interesting to note that even historians have tended to accept that Britain managed to harmonise its policies with the general well-being and desires of mankind. Paul Kennedy, concluding his classic work on Anglo-German antagonism, argues that Britain's foreign policy did have a transcending international ideology and that it was influenced by questions of right and wrong.[7] This marching song is still played.[8] Shorn of national conceit, Britain's foreign policy was what any country's foreign policy is supposed to be – a policy designed to safeguard Britain's national interests as perceived by the establishment and the people. A study of Britain's foreign policy shows that whatever the nuances of public debates and political needs, British statesmen were as much guided by considerations of *realpolitik* as those of other countries. It is understandable that the establishment of their own rule over 'non-white people' did not trouble many consciences at a time when most believed in the inferiority of non-whites. But even for 'white' 'oppressed' people, Britons' concern was very selective. They showed considerable sympathy for the oppressed Poles and Bulgars in East Europe and for Christians in Armenia. During the Near Eastern crisis of 1875–8, tremendous sympathy emerged for 'persecuted' minorities in the Balkans and for Russia as their saviour, as unprecedented sale of Gladstone's pamphlet testified. But, towards the end of 1877, when a victorious Russian army began its march towards Constantinople, old fears centring on threats to Britain's interests in the Near East and Middle East revived and the whole British establishment and the public turned sharply and strongly against Russia. At the mass level, a new xenophobic mood emerged adding a new word to English vocabulary: 'jingoism'. Similarly, Britain took interest in improving the condition of Christians in Armenia and the reason was not any concern for their plight but the calculation that a contented population would be better able to resist Russia's expansion in the direction of the Persian Gulf.

Was the Indian Empire valuable or expensive? Scholarly literature has yet to resolve this central question on determinants of Britain's presence in India. But there is no doubt whatever that Britain's policy makers deemed it absolutely essential to maintain their hold over the Indian Empire, whatever the risks. Even the nation at large showed irresistible fascination for India and endorsed government policies. British and American historians continue to reinforce the Liberal view that the possession of empire was irrational, that empire was 'an expensive and deleterious affair', that it was 'a waste of money'.[9] But the British not only shouldered the bill in monetary terms, but also readily bore all non-economic burdens. This study highlights that the foreign policy choices made by the policy makers were decisively influenced by the fact that they were determined to maintain the Raj. If far-flung and far-fetched precautions were taken by successive British governments for continued control over 'the jewel in the crown', then the valuation of the jewel must have been very high. It would be illusory to think that humanitarianism, personal ambition, missionary zeal or desire for prestige made successive British governments take such far-reaching precautions to

ensure control over India. However much in the background and ill-explored, power politics had an economic dimension.[10] It is said that there was music in the phrase ‘the Indian Empire’. Some of the notes must have been economic ones.

In diplomatic history, the battle between *Innenpolitik* and *Aussenpolitik* has raged for decades. British historians have tended to insist that British diplomacy was relatively free of domestic constraints and, that, while *Innenpolitik* might have accounted for much of Germany’s policies, it accounted for far less of Britain’s. Zara Steiner, in one of the most influential studies of the period, states emphatically and unequivocally: ‘This whole argument presupposes the *primat der Aussenpolitik* in any understanding of British diplomacy.’[11] Here it has been argued that the commitment to retain their *Koh-i-noor* was an important determinant of British foreign policy. If the need to maintain this empire was felt for economic benefits, for prestige, for maintaining the imperial system or for any such reason, the relevance of domestic considerations cannot be summarily negated. In fact, commenting on Britain’s decision to enter the war, Steiner says: ‘the British, fearful of losing what they had, sought to tighten their defences’.[12] The most concrete manifestation of what Britain had was its empire and in trying to maintain the empire, Britain was responding at least partially to domestic compulsions.

Britain’s foreign policy, thus, cannot be situated on a map of Europe. Britain’s status as a pre-eminent global power and the determination of policy makers and the nation to maintain that position decisively influenced Britain’s relations with other European countries. Visible or not, the security of India was a powerful constituent of their worldview and power. The pattern of relations with other countries and the diplomatic and military strategies adopted during the period highlight the importance of the Indian Empire. So, any account of British foreign policy which does not focus on concerns centring on the Indian Empire cannot claim to be comprehensive.

Appendix

British Prime Ministers

Gladstone	December 1868–February 1874
Disraeli	February 1874–April 1880
Gladstone	April 1880–June 1885
Salisbury	June 1885–January 1886
Gladstone	February 1886–July 1886
Salisbury	July 1886–August 1892
Gladstone	August 1892–March 1894
Rosebery	March 1894–June 1895
Salisbury	June 1895–July 1902
Balfour	July 1902–December 1905
Campbell-Bannerman	December 1905–April 1908
Asquith	April 1908–December 1916

Secretaries of State for Foreign Affairs

Granville	December 1870–February 1874
Derby	February 1874–April 1878
Salisbury	April 1878–April 1880
Granville	April 1880–June 1885
Salisbury	June 1885–January 1886
Rosebery	February 1886–July 1886
Iddesleigh	August 1886–January 1887
Salisbury	January 1887–August 1892
Rosebery	August 1892–March 1894
Kimberley	March 1894–June 1895
Salisbury	June 1895–October 1900
Lansdowne	October 1900–December 1905
Grey	December 1905–December 1916

Secretaries of State for India

Argyll	December 1868–February 1874
Salisbury	February 1874–April 1878
Cranbrook	April 1878–April 1880
Hartington	April 1880–December 1882
Kimberley	December 1882–June 1885
Randolph Churchill	June 1885–January 1886
Kimberley	February 1886–August 1886
Cross	August 1886–August 1892
Kimberley	August 1892–March 1894
Fowler	March 1894–June 1895
Hamilton	June 1895–September 1903
Brodrick	September 1903–December 1905
Morley	December 1905–November 1910
Crewe	November 1910–December 1916

Governors-General and Viceroys of India

Northbrook	May 1872–April 1876
Lytton	April 1876–June 1880
Ripon	June 1880–December 1884
Dufferin	December 1884–December 1888
Lansdowne	December 1888–January 1894
Elgin	January 1894–January 1899
Curzon	January 1899–November 1905
Minto	November 1905–November 1910
Hardinge	November 1910–April 1916

Notes

Preface

1 I have mostly used 'the Indian Empire' and 'India' for what was the British Empire in South Asia and was known as 'India' until August 1947. I have generally used 'Britain' and 'Great Britain', though it was usual to use 'England' and 'English' at least until 1914.
2 Note on the 'Military Needs of the Empire in a War with France and Russia' by E. Peach, DAAG, Military Intelligence Division, 31 May 1901. Public Records Office, London, Cab. 38/1/4.
3 See note by E. L. Altham, 10 August 1901, PRO, War Office, 106/48, E 3/2 and a comprehensive survey published by the War Office in 1907 on 'Military Resources of the Russian Empire', PRO, W.O. 33\409.
4 Balfour to Lansdowne, 12 December 1901, Balfour Papers, British Library, London, Add. Mss 49727.
5 Marshall (1995): 379.
6 P. M. Kennedy (1981): 72.
7 Bourne (1970); Steiner (1977); Chamberlain (1988). C.J. Lowe (1967) has devoted one chapter to the defence of India in the 1880s.
8 Millman (1979).
9 In fact, in Millman (1979) covering over 600 pages there are hardly any index entries on India. This is as much true of Heller (1983).
10 Martel (1986: 295).
11 Amongst these, mention may be made of Greaves (1959) and Gillard (1977). Two journals also devoted an issue each to this question: *International History Review* vol. 2 (1980), and *South Asian Studies* vol. 21 (1987).
12 K.M. Wilson (1985) and (1987a).
13 Robinson and Gallagher (1961: 13).
14 See Mackenzie (1986: 1–2). See also Viscount Grey of Fallodon, vol. 2 (1925: 5, 1988: 15–16).
15 Mill (1981).
16 See M. Taylor (1991: 1–23).
17 Seeley (1883/1899).

1 Constructing Britain's foreign policy

1 On this issue, see C. Howard (1967: 64–8).
2 See memorandum on 'Military Needs of the Empire in a War with France and Russia', August 1901, Public Records Office, London, War Office, 106/48, E3/2, para 10A. Also see Neilson (1991: 708).

3 P.M. Kennedy (1981: 20) and Hobsbawm (1987: 350).
4 On this issue see Beeler (1992: 547–75).
5 Friedberg (1988: 200).
6 On this issue see Offer (1989).
7 French (1982: 19).
8 Quoted in Marder (1940/1964: 65).
9 Ibid., 15.
10 Matthew, vol. 13 (1994: lxvii–lxix).
11 Hobsbawm (1987: 59).
12 For this article see Edward Dicey (1881/1986: 31–2).
13 Mackenzie (1982: 1–2), also Taylor (1991: 1–23).
14 Quoted in Marshall (1993: 390).
15 The white settler colonies of Canada, Newfoundland, the Cape Colony and Natal, Australia and Newfoundland were self-governing and ran their own domestic affairs. However, Britain had responsibility for their defence.
16

Area of colonies governed from Britain in 1880

	Total area	*Percentage*
Dependent global empire	2,246,000	-
Empire excluding India	341,700	15.2
Indian Empire	1,904,000	84.8

For details see Table 1.1

17

The British Empire

Population in thousands					*Percentage*			
Year	UK	RG	India	All other dependant colonies	UK	RG	India	All other dependant colonies
1872	31,874	7,018	160,788	5,399	15.5	3.4	78.4	2.6
1912	45,436	24,186	322,441	51,582	10.2	5.4	72.6	11.7

Source: Compiled from figures given in Davis and Huttenback (1986: 28)
RG: Dominions with responsible government

18 For the area of these colonies see Table 1.1
19 Nish (1987: 667).
20 A.N. Porter (1991: 195), also McLean (1976: 304).
21 See note by Fredrick Roberts, 13 June 1887, National Archives of India, New Delhi, Foreign Department (Secret) Frontier Proceedings, October 1887, nos 286–91.
22 See Gillard (1977: 14–17); Yapp (1987a: 50–7).
23 Steiner (1969: 265).
24 Joll (1973: 19), see also 15, 82–3.
25 Monypenny and Buckle, vol. 4 (1916: 467).
26 ibid.
27 Quoted in Darby (1987: 24).
28 Martel (1991: 679–80); McDermott (1979: 100), K.M. Wilson (1981: 21–41).
29 P M. Kennedy (1976: 201).
30 See minutes of the 111th meeting of the Committee of Imperial Defence, 26 May 1911, PRO, Cab. 38/18/40.
31 Bourne (1970: 7).
32 Bernard Porter recounts ‘moments of non-isolation’ (1987: 37–8).

33 Salisbury to Morier, 1 February 1988. Salisbury Papers, quoted in C.J. Lowe (1965: 46–7).
34 Derby to Russel, 31 October 1876, quoted in P.M. Kennedy (1980: 37).
35 Ibid., 37.
36 Russel to Derby, 8 January 1876, PRO, F.O. 64/850, no. 15, quoted in Millman (1979: 65).
37 P.M. Kennedy (1980: 182).
38 See Bridge (1972: 384–86).
39 Minute by Grey, 21 November 1913, Nicolson Papers, PRO, F.O. 800/371.
40 For example see P.M. Kennedy (1980: 78, 185–6).
41 On this see Bosworth (1979: 1–38).
42 Beeler (1992: 556).
43 See D. N. I. Memorandum on Naval Policy, 13 October 1896, in Marder (1940/64: 576).
44 Salisbury to Dufferin, the Governor-General of India, 16 January 1891, Dufferin Papers, Correspondence with Persons in England.
45 See PRO, Cab. 37/21/15, 15 and Cab. 37/22/32, 37. Also PRO, W.O. 106/48.
46 For example Kimberley, the India Secretary for some ten years, wrote to Dufferin as early as 1886 that 'As far as it dares, it plays into the hands of Russia'. Kimberley to Dufferin, 25 August 1886, Dufferin Papers, Correspondence with the Secretary of State for India.
47 See S.R. Williamson (1969: 23).
48 See Joint Report of E.F. Chapman, the Director of Military Intelligence, and C.A.G. Bridge, the Director of Naval Intelligence, 18 March 1892, Cab. 37/31/10.
49 '…for many seasons past, as a matter of fact, no differences have arisen between Russia and us in that quarter, and the predominance of Germany in Northern Europe renders such differences much less likely than formerly'. Memorandum by A.W.A. Hood, July 1888, Cab. 37/22/44.
50 See Fromkin (1980: 936). Also P.M. Kennedy (1980: 411).
51 Millman (1981: 1).
52 Cain and Hopkins (1993: 398–9).
53 As in Millman (1981) and Seton-Watson (1935/1962).
54 Nish (1987: 667).
55 Salisbury to A.H. Layard, 9 May 1878, BL, Layard Papers, Add. Mss 39137, pp. 82–4.
56 See Khalfin (1987: 645).
57 For the text of this circular see Fraser-Tytler (1915: 305–9). For a discussion of Russia's motives see Waldron (1997: 103–38). See also Palat (1988: 157–297) and Kazemzadeh (1962: 489–529).
58 Khalfin (1987: 639–46); Fromkin (1980: 949–50).
59 Greaves (1959: 27).
60 On this see Fromkin (1980: 950).
61 See, for example, the file 'Military Needs of the Empire', PRO, W.O. 106/48, E 3/2.
62 New Delhi became the capital of India in 1912.
63 Gillard (1977: 29); Chakravarty (1976: 33–41).
64 On this issue see Petrov (1987: 625–38).
65 See Duthie (1981: 36–72).
66 Yapp (1987b: 647–65), also note by F. Roberts, 28 August 1891, para 4, PRO, Cab. 38/1/2.
67 Quoted in Grenville (1960: 25).
68 Quoted in Sumner (1942/1968: 7–8).
69 Quoted in Fischer (1967: 121).
70 Mahajan (1982: 173).

71 Sir H. Drummond-Wolff to Salisbury, 6 July 1888 reporting his conversation with Prince Dolgorouki, NAI, Foreign Department (Secret), External Proceedings, September 1888, nos 117–18.
72 Note by Bertie, Under Secretary in the Foreign Office at that time, 18 January 1898, Bertie Papers, PRO, F.O. 800/176.
73 See Memorandum by Brackenbury, 25 January 1887, PRO, Cab. 37/19/8 and India Office Memorandum, November 1891, PRO, Cab. 37/20/29. Extracts from both are printed in C.J. Lowe, vol. 2 (1967: 45–7).
74 On this see Chapter 6 below.
75 K. Neilson (1991: 707).
76 Memorandum by Major J. S. Rothwell, 7 July 1884, PRO, Cab. 37/13/36.
77 See Alder (1981: 318–29).
78 The other four capitals were Paris, Vienna, St Petersburg and Brussels. On this see Steiner (1982: 552).
79 Memorandum by Salisbury, 4 June 1892, PRO, Cab. 37/31/10. Also in Bourne (1970: 429–32).
80 Cain and Hopkins (1993: 398–9) and Millman (1981: 454).
81 See Inalcik with Quataert (1994: 759–65).
82 See memorandum by J.L.A. Simmons, Inspector General of Fortifications, 30 October 1876, Simmons Papers, PRO, F.O. 358/2; Lytton to Carnarvon, 21 January 1877; Lytton to Salisbury, 9 July 1877, Lytton Papers, Mss Eur. 518/2.
83 Nickjoo (1979: 1).
84 Despatch to the Russian ambassador in London, 6 May 1877, Parliamentary Papers, C. 1770 (1877), pp. 135–6. Also in Bourne (1970: 407–9).
85 Heller (1983: 1).
86 Shukla (1973: 121–2).
87 Ibid.
88 Salisbury's memorandum, 4 June 1892, PRO, Cab. 37/31/10.
89 Graham (1967: 1).
90 Lansdowne to Sir Arthur Hardinge (Minister at Tehran), 6 January 1902, BDOW, vol. 4. No. 321a; emphasis added.
91 Reports of all activities of Russia in Central Asia were duly collected, compiled and analysed at London and Calcutta. See for example NAI, Foreign Department (Secret) Frontier Proceedings, August 1887, nos 461–6.
92 Duthie (1979: 187).
93 It was only in the twentieth century that the question of obtaining oil became a matter of concern when its use as fuel for the navy began. The Anglo-German naval rivalry heightened this preoccupation. By 1914 Britain had secured a monopoly over oil in Persia and became concerned about deposits of oil in Mesopotamia; see Kent (1976).
94 The boundary between Persia and Baluchistan was demarcated in the late 1870s. Some modifications were made in 1905.
95 See George Hamilton to the government of India, 6 July 1900, FO, Persia, 623/14. BDOW, vol. 4, no. 320.
96 Minute by Salisbury, 25 July 1885, F.O. 65/1247.
97 Giving instructions to Drummond-Wolff before his departure as ambassador to Persia in February 1888, Salisbury wrote: 'It is to the interest of this country that the integrity of Persia should be maintained, that its resources should be developed, and that its government should be strong, independent and friendly'. Salisbury to Wolff, very confd., 29 February 1888, F.O. 60/491.
98 On this issue see Cain and Hopkins (1993: 411–18).
99 Seistan lay to the west of Baluchistan. It was believed that Russia could send an army from Khorasan in the north of Persia to Baluchistan in India via Seistan.
100 Greaves (1959: 26–7, 42).

101 India Office to Foreign Office, 22 May 1889, PRO, F.O. 60/506.
102 Hamilton to Curzon, private, 7 November 1901, Curzon Papers, Mss Eur. F. 111.
103 After prolonged haggling, it was decided in 1879 that the government of India would pay twelve-seventeenths of the expense. This did not satisfy the Foreign Office. See Greaves (1959: 25–6).
104 A. Nicolson in the Foreign Office did comment 'Recently we have left the Government of India entirely out of account'. BDOW, vol. 4, no. 294.
105 On the First Afghan War see Norris (1967).
106 He had been Chief Commissioner of Punjab from 1852 to 1859. Therefore, this School was also referred to as 'the Punjab School'.
107 See IOL, Letters/Political and Secret/3/87, pp. 468–70 and 758–9. This feeling forms a constant undercurrent in all letters and memoranda on the subject.
108 On this aspect see Duthie (1981: 36–72).
109 Ibid., 36.
110 See IOL, Letters/Political and Secret/3/73, pp. 517–32.
111 On this issue see Singhal (1963/1982).
112 Ibid., 7–8.
113 'Resident' was the term used for the representative of the Governor-General of India at the court of a princely state in India or its neighbourhood.
114 See Moulton (1968: 227–30).
115 This word was coined by Argyll, the Secretary of State for India, for the panic caused by Russia's annexation of Merv.
116 Northbrook to Argyll, 5 February 1874, quoted in Duthie (1981: 62).
117 See Parliamentary Papers, 1878–9, vol. 56, 112–18.
118 Quoted in Thornton (1966: 44).
119 Ellenborough, who became the Governor-General of India in 1842, was the first Governor-General to take this route. He took 115 days to reach Bombay. Farnie (1969: 7, 19).
120 Quoted in Graham (1967: 24).
121 For a list of such books see Hoskins (1928/1966: 32–3).
122 Ibid.
123 See Cain and Hopkins (1993: 359–60). The situation changed only in the 1880s when gold and diamond deposits were discovered in adjacent areas.
124 Quoted in P.M. Kennedy (1980: 220).
125 Graham (1965: 66–8).
126 Note by Director of Naval Intelligence, 12 November 1895, quoted in Marder (1940: 247–8).
127 Kent (1984: 77).
128 The three battleships commissioned in 1883 were to be ready only by 1888, 1889 and 1890. See Memorandum by A.W.A. Hood, July 1886, Cab. 37/22/44, also Martel (1986: 28).
129 P.M. Kennedy (1980: 23).
130 Ibid.
131 BDOW, vol. 4, no. 210. See also Fay, vol. 1 (1928/1965: 72–3).
132 Hoskins (1928/1966: 268). For details see Robinson and Gallagher (1961: 76–7).
133 Cited in Hoskins (1928/1966: 268).
134 Ibid.
135 At that time merchant ships were much smaller.
136 Farnie (1969: 29).
137 Chamberlain (1988: 137).
138 Farnie (1969: 30).
139 Ibid.
140 Ibid., 43.
141 Gladstone to Queen Victoria, 21 May 1870, PRO, Cab. 41/2/23.

142 Troops were sent to India in 1857 on this route. They were able to cover major part of overland journey from Alexandria to Cairo on this railway and the last lap of forty kilometres in vans which required about a ten hours' journey. See Hoskins (1928/1966: 44–5).
143 For details see Rodgers (1984: 131).
144 See Parliamentary Papers, 1871, no. 386, 36–7.
145 Hoskins (1928/1966: 430–2).
146 In Britain a minister, the parliamentary head of an administrative department, is known as the Secretary of State.
147 During British rule, the Englishmen in India referred to themselves as Anglo-Indians. This phrase was also used to refer to people of mixed British and Indian parentage.
148 On this see Duthie (1979: 181–207, 1981: 36–72).
149 Darby (1987: 26). Charles Webster described the First Afghan War as a question of Indian strategy and politics not of British foreign policy; Webster (1963: 752).
150 This is a recurring theme. For example see McIntyre (1967); Pearce and Stewart (1992: 155).
151 Singhal (1963/1982: xi); also Darby (1987: 26).
152 On relations between the government of India and the British government see Kaminsky (1986).
153 C.C. Eldridge comments, 'In fact, every conceivable expense in governing India was charged against the Indian revenue, from the costs of the army in India to the wages of charladies in the India Office in London. The costs of the mutiny in 1857, the cost of transferring the East India Company's rights to the Crown, gifts to the Zanzibar mission, the expenses of the diplomatic establishments in China and Persia, part of the expenses of the Mediterranean fleet, the cost of the telegraph from England to India and even the maintenance of a lunatic asylum at Ealing were laid at India's door'. Eldridge (1978: 63–4).

2 Flaunting the Indian Empire, 1874–80

1 In 1872, Gladstone's government had resolved the long-standing dispute with the United States over the ship *Alabama*, which had been running since the American Civil War. Britain agreed to pay over £3 million in compensation to the United States, a vast sum by the standards of the day but far less than many influential Americans demanded.
2 Speech in the Free Trade Hall, Manchester, 3 April 1878. Monypenny and Buckle, vol. 5 (1920: 191–2). Also Bourne (1970: 403).
3 Kebbel (1882: 521).
4 See Baumgart (1982: 2); Hobsbawm (1987: 60).
5 On this issue see Bodelsen (1924/1960: 120–3).
6 Koebner and Schmidt (1964: 110–11).
7 *Parliamentary Debates*, H.C., vol. 62, col. 1020.
8 The notion that cartridges given for rifles to Indian soldiers were smeared with cow or pig fat had become an important source of discontent against the Raj.
9 Quoted in Fenner (1987: 54).
10 Harcourt (1980: 87–109), also Rodgers (1984: 129–49).
11 Rodgers (1984: 145). All charges for this expedition were borne by the British government. See Parliamentary Papers, C. 128 (1878), p. 298.
12 For Britain's reaction see Queen Victoria to the German Emperor, 20 June 1875 in Dugdale, vol. 1 (1928: 14–15). For details of 'war-in-sight' crisis see Langer (1931/1950: 40–55).
13 See Monypenny and Buckle, vol. 5 (1920: 422).
14 See above, pp. 28–9.

15 Farnie (1969: 234).
16 Quoted in Hoskins (1928: 466–7).
17 Quoted in Bradford (1982: 323).
18 An amendment to limit the expenditure to £60,000 was defeated by 360 votes to 16.
19 *Parliamentary Debates*, H.C., 9 March 1876, vol. 27, cols 1727–28.
20 The government had failed to inform the leaders of the opposition in advance. There was also some debate on the appropriateness of title.
21 Fenner (1987: 49).
22 Mackenzie (1984: 4).
23 On this crisis, a very well-researched work is (Millman 1979).
24 On this issue see Millman (1979: 63–7).
25 Ibid., 63–4.
26 Seton-Watson (1935/1962: 33, also n. 2).
27 Odo Russel, the British ambassador, had offered to resign on this issue; ibid., 34.
28 Disraeli to the Queen, 29 May 1876, PRO, Cab. 47/7/12.
29 Millman (1979: 101).
30 Disraeli to the Queen, 29 May 1876, PRO, Cab. 47/7/12.
31 The efforts made by the powers to mediate present an exceedingly intricate and convoluted picture. The Reichstadt Agreement of 8 July 1876 between Russia and Austria was one such effort. See Millman (1979: chaps 8 and 9).
32 Lytton to Salisbury, 25 October 1876, Lytton Papers, Mss Eur. E. 218/518/1. Salisbury to Disraeli, 29 October 1876, cited in Millman (1979: 193).
33 Millman (1979: 214–18).
34 D. Gillard (1977: 132).
35 See Millman (1979: 454).
36 Salisbury to Lytton, Lytton Papers, 8 March 1877, E. 218/516/2.
37 This report is available in the Public Records Office in Simmons Papers, PRO, F.O. 358/1–3. J.L.A. Simmons was the Inspector General of Fortifications. This report was used in 1878 when Cyprus was occupied to countervail the increase in Russia's influence in Asia Minor.
38 See Salisbury to Lytton, 9 February 1877, Lytton Papers, E. 218/516/2.
39 All that ultimately emerged was an innocuous London Protocol of 31 March 1877 which merely called upon the Porte to introduce reforms. Even this was rejected by the Porte.
40 The Austro-Russian military convention was signed on 15 January and the political convention on 18 March 1877. See Millman (1979: ch. 16).
41 Salisbury to Lytton, 22 June 1877, private, Lytton Papers, Mss Eur. E. 218/516/2.
42 Lytton to Salisbury, 9 July 1877, Lytton Papers, Mss Eur. E. 218/518/3. In their Friday congregations and other public platforms, Indian Muslims had expressed themselves in favour of Turkey even during the Turco-Serb War. The movement was clearly anti-Russian. Therefore, the government of India had adopted a permissive attitude. On this issue see NAI, Home Department Public B. Proceedings, February 1878, nos 215–244. See also Shukla (1973: ch. 5); Millman (1979: 193–4).
43 Layard to Salisbury, 17 April and 1 May 1878, Layard Papers, BL, Add. Mss 39131.
44 Bourne (1970: 130).
45 Bradford (1982: 345).
46 Disraeli to the Queen, Secret, 17 April 1877, PRO, Cab. 41/9/16.
47 Ibid.
48 Millman (1979: 305).
49 Derby's despatch to Count Shuvalov (Russian ambassador at London), 6 May 1877, Parliamentary Papers, C. 1770 (1877), 135–6. Also in Bourne (1970: 407–9).
50 Bourne (1970: 30).
51 This section is based on Millman (1979: ch. 16).

52 *Parliamentary Debates*, H.C., 8 February 1878, vol. 237, cols 1315–51.
53 Millman (1979: 379).
54 Ibid., 392; also 374–8.
55 Ibid., 392. See also Matthew, vol. 9 (1986: liii–iv).
56 Many versions of this song exist. One of these runs:

We don't want to fight
But by Jingo if we do
We'll stay at home and mind the store
And leave it to the mild Hindoo

57 It is worth noting that here the advantages in human and material terms flowing to Britons from the possession of India are aptly set forth. This version is given in Davis and Huttenback (1986: 156). A similar version is given in Doyle (1986: 287).
58 Contemporary observers, both British and foreign, commented on this. The Spanish Minister at London talked of the 'irresolution and timidity' of the British government. See Millman (1979: 580, n. 9). Even Ponsonby, a British diplomat, compared the British squadron at the entrance of the Dardanelles to a terrier sniffing at a hole hoping to find a rabbit but fearing a badger might be at the bottom of it. See Bradford (1982: 345).
59 Millman (1979: 397).
60 Turkey had fourteen first-class armoured battleships at that time, most of them built in British shipyards. This navy was larger and more modern than that of the German Empire at that time. See Hubatsch (1985: 110).
61 Seton-Watson (1935/1962: 333).
62 On this issue Derby resigned, and Salisbury moved from the India Office to the Foreign Office.
63 Circular to European Powers, 1 April 1878, Parliamentary Papers, C. 1989 (1878), 765–72. An extract from this circular is given in Bourne (1970: 412–13).
64 See Despatches from Layard, 28 January 1878, no. 130; 5 February 1878, no. 175; 5 February 1878, no. 263; F.O. 78/2777, 2778, 2780.
65 Memorandum by Brackenbury, 25 January 1887, Intelligence Branch, War Office, PRO, Cab. 37/10/8.
66 See Layard Papers, BL, Add. Mss, 39130, letters to Disraeli, Derby and Lytton.
67 See Temple Papers, IOL Mss Eur. F. 86, Correspondence 1878. All these arguments were used in the debate on the vote of credit for strengthening the army of Britain in anticipation of trouble with Russia. *Parliamentary Debates*, H.C., vol. 237, cols 560–5 and vol. 238, cols 52–5.
68 Anderson (1966/1970: 200).
69 Durrans (1982: 262–84). Durrans uses the phrase 'Asiatic soldiers' perhaps out of habit.
70 Disraeli to the Queen, 12 April 1878, PRO, Cab. 41/11/10.
71 *Parliamentary Debates*, H.C., 27 May 1878. See Millman (1979: 443–4).
72 It was a strip of Turkish territory that separated Serbia and Montenegro.
73 Actually the Russians delayed the evacuation of Balkan mountain range. In the autumn of 1879, when they did withdraw because of British pressure, the Turks were too frightened to re-occupy the Balkan passes because of the intense anti-Turk feeling amongst the Bulgars. See Bourne (1970: 134).
74 Printed in Anderson (1970: 105).
75 See Simmons Papers, F.O. 358/1. Salisbury to Layard, 2, 9, 10 May 1878. Layard Papers, BL, Add. Mss 39137. Also Despatch from Salisbury to Layard, 30 May 1878, NAI, Government of India, Foreign Department (Secret) Proceedings, 1878, nos 34–42, KW no. 2.
76 On this see note by W.S. Churchill, 21 June 1910, Cab. 37/89/83.

77 See Layard Papers, Add. Mss 39013, pp. 248–9, NAI, Foreign Department, Political A Proceedings, July 1876, no. 113 and Political and Secret Home Correspondence, vol. XXVI, July-September 1878, also Shukla (1973: ch. 4). Mohammarah (now Abadan) was a port on Shatt-al-Arab. In 1891 a British vice-consulate was established there.
78 See Hoskins (1928/1966: 440), also *Parliamentary Debates*, H.C., 18 July 1878, col. 1773.
79 Disraeli to Queen Victoria, 21 February 1879, Cab. 41/12/7.
80 *Parliamentary Debates*, H.C., 18 July 1878, col. 1773. See Thornton (1962: 573).
81 European powers were aware of Britain's motives. For example, see Pourtales, chargé d'affairs in St Petersburg, to Caprivi, 15 September 1890, Dugdale, vol. 2 (1929: 112, also 109).
82 See Layard's despatches to Foreign Office sent to India Office and printed for the use of the Cabinet, Political and Home Correspondence, vols XVIII, XXII, Layard Papers, BL, Add. Mss 39130.
83 C. Howard (1967: 8, 45, 89).
84 W.S. Churchill, Paper on the Condition of Cyprus, 26 June 1910, PRO, Cab. 37/89/83.
85 See Salisbury's Memorandum for the Cabinet, 26 June 1878, PRO, F.O. 78/2911. Also in Bourne (1970: 415–16).
86 Ibid.
87 See Parliamentary Papers, C. 1770 (1877), 135–6.
88 Medlicott (1938: 103–4, 121–2).
89 See Bradford (1982: 349–50).
90 Millman (1979: 448–51). All the quotations that follow are from these pages.
91 See Dugdale, vol. 1 (1928: ch. 10). See also P.M. Kennedy (1980: 33–5).
92 P.M. Kennedy (1980: 157–8).
93 Disraeli to the Queen, 3 December 1879, *Letters of Queen Victoria*, 2nd series, vol. 3, 56–7.
94 Salisbury to Lytton, Private, 13 July 1877, Lytton Papers, Mss Eur. E. 218/516/2.
95 See India Office Library, London, C/137. Influence of the members of the Council of India on Salisbury has been studied by Duthie (1979: 181–208).
96 Salisbury to Lytton, 22 June 1877, Lytton Papers, Mss Eur. E. 218/516/2.
97 Salisbury to Lytton, Private, 4 August 1878, Lytton Papers, Mss Eur. E. 218/516/1.
98 Ibid.
99 Salisbury to Northbrook, 19 November 1875, cited in Duthie (1979: 195).
100 For example see Despatch to India, 22 January 1875, Secret, no. 2, Appointment of British Agent at Herat, IOL, Letters/Political and Secret/7/320: 3–25. Salisbury to Cranbrook, 17 September 1878, cited in Duthie (1979: 194–5).
101 See above, p. 23.
102 Singhal (1963/1982: 14).
103 For this despatch of Salisbury see Parliamentary Papers, C. 56, 1878–9, 156–9.
104 See Singhal (1963/1982: 17–19).
105 Parliamentary Papers, C. 56 (1878–9), 157.
106 See above, p. 40.
107 See speech by Grant Duff, a former Under Secretary of State for India, *Parliamentary Debates*, H.C., vol. 234, cols 1833–41.
108 For details see Parliamentary Papers, C. 56 (1877–8).
109 The Indian agent who stayed at Kabul on behalf of the government of India.
110 Parliamentary Papers, C. 56 (1877–8), 224.
111 Disraeli to the Queen, 22 July 1877, Monypenny and Buckle, vol. 6 (1920: 155).
112 See Despatch from the government of India to the Secretary of State for India, 2 July 1877, paras 44–6, IOL, Political and Secret Letters and Enclosures from India, vol. 15.

113 For this effort see Layard Papers, BL, Add. Mss 39164. See also Singhal (1963/1982: 24–30).
114 See Singhal (1963/1982: 10–11).
115 Ibid., 34–8.
116 For a report on this meeting see Disraeli to the Queen, Secret, 26 October 1878, PRO, Cab. 41/11/18. Also in Bourne (1970: 417–20).
117 Secretary of State to the Governor-General, 24 October 1878, OIL, Political and Secret Letters and Enclosures from India, vol. 19, 1484.
118 Abdur Rahman had been a pensioner of the Russian government since 1867. Selection of such a man was unexpected. See Singhal (1963/1982: 62–5). However, this decision proved to be a wise one.
119 Parliamentary Papers, Central Asia (1881), vol. 2, no. 1 of 1881.
120 See Klein (1974: 97–121); Durrans (1982: 265); Singhal (1963/1982: 26). Also Chakravarty (1976: 238–9); Yapp (1987: 83).
121 Disraeli to Salisbury, 1 April 1877, Disraeli to the Queen, 22 July 1877 and 26 October 1878 in Monypenny and Buckle, vol. 2 (1912: 251); vol. 6 (1920: 155 and 386–8), respectively.
122 Salisbury to Disraeli, Private, 31 October 1875; Bourne (1970: 403–4).
123 Disraeli to the Queen, 26 October 1878, Cab. 41/11/18.
124 See Pearce and Stewart (1992: 155); Eldridge (1978: 109–10); Durrans (1982: 267).
125 See Porter (1983/1986: 38); Millman (1979: 453).
126 B. Porter (1983/1986: 38).
127 *The Times*, 15 August 1876, cited in Durrans (1982: 264).
128 Cited in A.J.P. Taylor (1957: 64).
129 Florence Nightingale to P.K. Sen, 20 June 1879, cited in Gopal (1953: 1).

3 In the garb of moral imperatives, 1880–5

1 For some recent examples see Chamberlain (1988: 142); Matthew, vol. 10 (1990: lxii); Cain and Hopkins (1993: 204–5); Beeler (1997: 15, 16).
2 Gladstone's Third Midlothian Campaign Speech, 27 November 1879. See Bourne (1970: 420–2).
3 Matthew, vol. 10 (1990: lxii).
4 Ibid., lxii–lxiii.
5 Ibid., lxiii.
6 Ibid.
7 Eldridge (1979: 154).
8 Cited in Chamberlain (1988: 132).
9 Gladstone to Ripon, 6 September and 4 November 1881, Gladstone Papers, The British Library, Add. Mss 43515. This argument is still ongoing; see Davis and Huttenback (1986); see also Mahajan (1992: 931–8).
10 Matthew, vol. 10 (1990: lxiv).
11 See Chamberlain (1976: 231–45).
12 Quoted in Chamberlain (1988: 142).
13 See Ripon to Hartington, 1 August 1880, Ripon Papers, BL, Add. Mss 43610.
14 General Haines, the commander-in-chief in India and W. Stokes, the military member of the Viceroy's Council, recorded their minutes against evacuation from Kandhar. See IOL, Political and Secret Letters and Enclosures from India, vol. 26, 1219–20.
15 Ripon Papers, BL, Add. Mss 43610, Despatch no. 23, 39.
16 'Note on Kandahar' by Napier of Magdala, Gibraltar, 12 October 1880, PRO, Cab. 37/3/58.
17 See Hartington to Ripon, Ripon Papers, BL, Add. Mss 43615.
18 Singhal (1963/1982: 80).

19 See Ripon to Hartington, 9 May 1880 and Minute by Ripon, 11 September 1880. Ripon Papers, BL, Add. Mss 4360; also Singhal (1963/1982: 198, Appendix F).
20 See Lepel Griffin to Abdur Rahman Khan, July 1880, PRO, Cab. 37/2/36.
21 There were some like Northbrook in the Liberal Cabinet who criticised this. See memorandum by Northbrook, 15 October 1880, Cab. 37/3/59.
22 Singhal (1963/1982: 83).
23 P.M. Kennedy (1980: 164–6).
24 Balfour to Lansdowne, 12 December 1901, Balfour Papers, BL, Add. Mss 49727.
25 See Barclay (1914: 41–2).
26 See Bourne (1970: 139).
27 For controversy amongst historians on this issue see Knaplund (1935/1970: 131–40). For the view accepted now see Matthew, vol. 9 (1986: xxxiv) and vol. 10 (1990: lxvii), and Bourne (1970: 137).
28 The central powers showed reluctance to participate, but the Turks gave in to the threat of blockade. See Knaplund (1935/1970: 140).
29 Telegram from Göschen to Granville, 25 March 1881, quoted in ibid., 148.
30 It is significant that Gladstone did not consider relinquishing control over Cyprus even after the occupation of Alexandria in 1882, when the position at Cyprus became largely redundant from a strategic point of view. On this see Military Intelligence Memorandum on Naval Policy, 13 October 1896, in Marder (1940/1964: 573, Appendix III). For reasons for retaining Cyprus thereafter, see the paper by W.S. Churchill, 21 June 1910, PRO, Cab. 37/89/83.
31 Knaplund (1935/1970: 157).
32 Gladstone to Granville, 1 September 1883, Letterbooks, vol. XX, p. 313, BL, Gladstone Papers.
33 For this treaty see Langer (1931/1950: 204–12).
34 Oliver and Sanderson, vol. 6 (1985: 596–7). Ismail was Khedive from 1863 to 1879.
35 For a good summary of this issue see Thornton (1962: 584–6).
36 See Disraeli to the Queen, 21 February 1879, Cab. 41/12/7.
37 See Robinson and Gallagher (1961: 86).
38 Ibid.
39 Schölch (1981).
40 Ibid., 77–8.
41 It was a body representing the provincial notables set up by Khedive Ismail in 1866. It was called *majlis al-nuwwab* and was chosen by direct open ‘elections’. It was designed as an additional instrument of administration. Until the crisis of 1879 its members did not take any overt political initiative. See Oliver and Sanderson (1985: 594–5).
42 On this see Schölch (1976: 773–85).
43 See Cain and Hopkins (1993: 366).
44 See Blunt (1907).
45 Matthew, vol. 10 (1990: lxxii). This figure is based on a reckoning of his assets which he had drawn up in December 1882.
46 See Cain and Hopkins (1993: 367).
47 Schölch (1981: 312); Oliver and Sanderson, vol. 6 (1985: 596–7).
48 Matthew, vol. 10 (1990: lxx).
49 Schölch (1981: ch. 3).
50 Robinson and Gallagher (1961: ch. 4).
51 Matthew, vol. 10 (1990: lxxiii).
52 See Farnie (1969: 288–9). The telegraph line between Britain and its Indian Empire ran from London to Lisbon, thence to Gibraltar, Malta and Alexandria before going overland to Suez. From there it ran to Aden and across to Bombay. The only weak point in this chain was in Egypt, which was partially eliminated when the British occupied it in 1882. On this see P.M. Kennedy, ‘Imperial Cable Communications and Strategy, 1870–1914; in P.M. Kennedy (1979: 77).

53 Cartwright to Granville, 16 July 1882, Granville papers, PRO, 30/29/285; also Galbraith (1979: 274).
54 See Farnie (1969: 290).
55 See Robinson and Gallagher (1961: 119).
56 Ibid.
57 Ensor (1936: 79).
58 See Gladstone to Madame O. Novikov, 15 September 1882; Matthew, vol. 10 (1990: 334).
59 Gladstone to Chiders, 15 September 1882; ibid., 333.
60 Such a treaty was signed in April 1888. For the text see Gorst and Johnson (1997: 3–5).
61 Farnie (1969: 293).
62 Blunt played a most important role in this respect. For this view see Blunt (1907).
63 Of contemporary works by participants in the process, the following works became very popular: Alfred Milner, *England in Egypt* (London, 1892) (this book went through four editions and eleven impressions during 1892–4); Sir Auckland Colvin, *The Making of Modern Egypt* (London, 1906), by the Controller-General of Egypt; and Lord Cromer, *Modern Egypt* (London, 1908). On this see Farnie (1969: 484).
64 Robinson and Gallagher (1961). For comments on their approach see Hopkins (1986: 370–3).
65 Robinson and Gallagher (1961: 120).
66 Malet (1909: 59).
67 So powerful has been the hold of the received view that various aspects are still repeated in surveys of British history. See Chamberlain (1988: 144–5) and Pearce and Stewart (1992: 158).
68 Eldridge (1978: 365–6).
69 See Galbraith (1979: 274–92); Hopkins (1986: 384–5). Later Urabi admitted to a charge of rebellion and slipped quietly into exile.
70 See Hopkins (1986: 388).
71 Milner called it a 'veiled' protectorate. This phrase has been repeated since. In fact, Britain's control was not even 'veiled'.
72 Cain and Hopkins (1993: 365).
73 Matthew, vol. 10 (1990: lxxii).
74 For Blunt's views see his *Secret History of British Occupation of Egypt* published twenty-five years later (Blunt 1907). See also Chamberlain (1981: 21).
75 See Farnie (1969: 292) and Schölch (1976: 773, n. 4).
76 Cain and Hopkins (1993: 369–70), also Hopkins (1986: 380–5).
77 Swartz (1993: 369–70), also Hopkins (1986: 380–5).
78 Quoted in Robinson and Gallagher (1961: 123).
79 Gladstone to Derby, 24 December 1884; Matthew, vol. 11 (263–4).
80 Gladstone to Ripon, 6 September 1882, BL, Add. Mss 43515; also in Matthew, vol. 10 (1990: 326–7).
81 India was a colony of Britain. Therefore the requirements of Britain could be met even when India did not have wheat to spare. The export of wheat was not prohibited or restricted even during the Bengal famine of 1874. See Farnie (1969: 360–3).
82 Farnie (1969: 292–3); Hopkins (1986: 374, 390–1); Cain and Hopkins (1993: 368); Schölch (1976: 774).
83 Schölch (1976: 774, 784).
84 Hopkins (1986: 374, 390–1).
85 Matthew, vol. 10 (1990: lxiv). See also vol. 9 (1986: xlii).
86 Quoted in Matthew, vol. 10 (1990: lxxiv).
87 They conclude that 'each fateful step seemed to be dictated by circumstances, rather than will'. Robinson and Gallagher (1961: 120).
88 See Martel (1986a: 20).

89 Ibid.
90 Matthew, vol. 10 (1990: lxxix).
91 Robinson and Gallagher (1961: 133).
92 Pearce and Stewart (1992: 160).
93 Note by Gladstone, 12 March 1885, Matthew, vol. 11 (1990: 83).
94 In June 1885 the Mahdi died, probably of typhus. A few weeks later, the last Egyptian garrisons in the Sudan were withdrawn (except those at Suakin and Equatoria). The half-hearted attempt to advance from Suakin to the Nile was abandoned. See Oliver and Sanderson, vol. 6 (1985: 619).
95 Graham (1967: ch. 2).
96 Gladstone to Dilke, 14 December 1884; Matthew, vol. 11 (1990: 259).
97 For correspondence on Kirk's mission see PRO, F.O. 84/1679.
98 Despatch from Sir John Kirk, 9 December 1884, confdl, see Knaplund (1935/1970: 180).
99 Farnie (1969: 293–4, 334); J.S. Galbraith and A. Lutfi al Sayyid-Marsot (1978: 471–3).
100 See Matthew, vol. 10 (1990: lxxxviii).
101 Dugdale, vol. 1 (1928: 195), introduction to chapter 13.
102 See Greaves (1959: 57). For maps see Darby and Fullard (1978: 186).
103 For reactions to the occupation of Merv see NAI, Foreign Department (Secret) Frontier Proceedings, December 1884, nos 384–98.
104 For correspondence on this question between London and St. Petersburg see NAI, Foreign Department (Secret) External Proceedings, June 1884, nos 396–416. The cost of the commission was shared by London and Calcutta after Ripon remonstrated against bearing the entire cost. See Singhal (1963/1982: 115).
105 P.M. Kennedy (1983: 178).
106 See memorandum by Major J.S. Rothwell, 7 July 1884, PRO, Cab. 37/13. Also printed in Jelavich (1973: 189–98).
107 Dufferin to Salisbury, 21 March 1885, Dufferin Papers, Correspondence with Persons in England.
108 Ibid.
109 See Gladstone's note on the Cabinet Meeting of 24 March 1885. Matthew, vol. 10 (1990: 312).
110 See NAI, Foreign Department (Secret) Foreign Proceedings, January 1886, nos 55–302.
111 Gladstone to the Queen, 12 March 1885, PRO, Cab. 41/19/20.
112 Early in May 1885, Randolph Churchill from the opposition benches presented to the House of Commons a vivid description of previous breaches of engagements and scornfully derided the government for having faith in the Russian word. See *Parliamentary Debates*, H.C., 4 May 1885, cols 1524–41.
113 For Gladstone's speech see *Parliamentary Debates*, H.C., 27 April 1885, cols 855–60.
114 For these telegrams see PRO, F.O. 65/1239.
115 Kimberley to Dufferin, private telegram, 20 April 1885, Dufferin Papers, Correspondence with the Secretary of State.
116 Greaves (1959: 72–3).
117 Ibid., 72.
118 See Dufferin to Kimberley, private, 23 March 1885, Dufferin Papers, Correspondence with the Secretary of State.
119 Beeler (1997: 22).
120 See Kimberley to Dufferin, 10, 17 and 24 April 1885, Dufferin Papers, Correspondence with the Secretary of State; Granville Papers, PRO, 30/29/186. Also see Robert Morier, British ambassador at St Petersburg, to Salisbury, Confdl. No. 146, 18 April 1888, PRO, F.O. 65/1348.
121 Cited in Greaves (1959: 66–7).

122 Memorandum by Rosebery, 26 April 1885, cited in Martel (1986: 21).
123 P.M. Kennedy (1980: 185).
124 For example, see Bismarck to Prince Henry VII of Reuss in Vienna, 9 April 1885 and other letters in Dugdale, vol. 1 (1928: 197–201).
125 P.M. Kennedy (1980: 185).
126 Of the books published in the 1990s see Pearce and Stewart (1992: 157); Beeler (1997: 15, 16).
127 See Gladstone to Hartington, 28 August 1882, Gladstone to Ripon, 6 September, 24 October, 27 November and 1 December 1882, BL, Add. Mss 43515.
128 Cited in Cecil, vol. 3 (1930: 136).

4 Courting the Triple Alliance, 1885–92

1 The forces that led to this urge to acquire colonies and to the partition of Africa remain unexplained until now. For a concise account of this controversy see Andrew Porter (1994).
2 Campbell (1974: 149–54).
3 Brackenbury to QMG, 14 April 1886, PRO, W.O. 33/47. See also note by Brackenbury, 'General Sketch of the Situation Abroad and at Home from a Military Standpoint'; 3 August 1886, W. A. White Papers, PRO, F.O. 364/3. William Arthur White was ambassador to Turkey from 1886–91.
4 Memorandum by Roberts, 'Is an Invasion of India by Russia Possible', Enclosure in Ripon to Kimberley, 5 April 1884, Ripon Papers, Correspondence with Secretary of State.
5 Friedberg (1988: 146); P.M. Kennedy (1983: 178).
6 After the fall of Gladstone's government in June 1885, the Conservatives formed the government which continued until January 1886. A new government was formed under Gladstone on 1 February. This government fell on the question of Home Rule to Ireland, so elections were held again in July 1886. The Conservatives together with the Liberal Unionists got an effective majority of about 120. This government lasted until August 1892.
7 However, for the first six months of his second administration, Lord Iddesleigh was the Foreign Secretary.
8 He faced opposition only from Randolph Churchill, 'the talented and unorthodox demagogue' who was India Secretary in his first administration and the Chancellor of Exchequer for the first six months in his second administration.
9 Except that sometimes there were some awkward questions from some Radicals. Rosebery, who took over from Salisbury in February 1886 and again in 1892, believed that the foreign policy of the country should not be dragged into the arena of party warfare. On this see Pearce and Stewart (1992: 162).
10 On this see Steiner (1969: ch. 1).
11 P.M. Kennedy (1980: 192).
12 Salisbury was the last 'noble' prime minister. Andrew Porter has argued that as a representative of the traditional landholding class, Salisbury attempted to prevent further financial decline of this class by resisting increased taxation. Hence, in foreign and imperial affairs he adopted a policy of restraint so as to avoid crises and hence expenses. See 'Lord Salisbury, Foreign Policy and Domestic Finance', in Blake and Cecil (1987). This argument has been demolished in this same collection in articles by John France and F.M.L. Thompson.
13 Swartz (1985: 147).
14 On this see Pugh (1982: ch. 3). The League was named after Disraeli's favourite flower.
15 See P.M. Kennedy (1980: 212); Lowe (1965: 112); Grenville (1964: 1).
16 Quoted in Greaves (1964: 12).

17 See P.M. Kennedy (1980: 184–5).
18 Memorandum by Brackenbury, 25 January 1887, PRO, Cab. 37/19/8.
19 Salisbury to Grosvenor, 11 September 1885, confdl, PRO, F.O. 65/1250, no. 336. See telegram from India Secretary to Viceroy, 25 August 1885 and Viceroy to India Secretary, 26 August 1885, NAI, Foreign Department (Secret) Frontier Proceedings, September 1885, nos 1098 and 1099.
20 As examples of this see NAI, Foreign Department (Secret) Frontier Proceedings, September 1885, nos 1053–1106 and October 1886, nos 29–88. See also Parliamentary Papers, C. 5114 (1887), 581, and Morgan (1981: 199).
21 Paper shown to Count Herbert Bismarck at Koenigstein by Currie, 22 August 1886; Bourne (1970: 423–5).
22 See P.M. Kennedy (1980: 165–6, 184–7).
23 Quoted in ibid., 185.
24 C.J. Lowe (1965: 90–1).
25 For a detailed account of relations with Burma during this period see Mukherjee (1988).
26 On this see Tuck (1978: 249–50).
27 Kimberley to Ripon, 4 September 1884, Ripon Papers, BL, Mss Eur. 43525.
28 Ripon to Kimberley, 26 September 1884, ibid.
29 NAI, Foreign Department (Political) External Proceedings, May 1883, 145–7; June 1883, nos 79–84.
30 Ibid., May 1884, no. 380.
31 Ibid., July 1884, no. 246. See also Parliamentary Papers C. 4614 (1886), 116–22.
32 Tuck (1978: 249).
33 See NAI, Foreign Department (Secret) External Proceedings, September 1885, nos 98–106 and January 1886, nos 432–7.
34 See Mukherjee (1988: 498–514).
35 IOL Records, Memo B., Book 3, *Further Correspondence relating to Affairs in Burma, 1880–1885*, 66.
36 See R. Churchill to Dufferin, 18 November 1885, Dufferin Papers, Correspondence with Persons in England.
37 Martin (1970: 256).
38 See Mukherjee (1988: 561).
39 Churchill to Dufferin, 18 November 1885, Dufferin Papers, Correspondence with Persons in England.
40 See Singhal (1959/1981: 104); Mukherjee (1988: 561).
41 See Salisbury to Sir W.A. White, Private, 24 September 1885, PRO, F.O. 364/8, part 2. Also in Bourne (1970: 425–6).
42 Martel (1986a: 425–6).
43 Salisbury to White, 24 September 1885, in Bourne (1970: 425–6).
44 Quoted in Langer (1931/1950: 16).
45 Quoted in Bourne (1970: 146).
46 Salisbury to R. Churchill, cited in W.S. Churchill, vol. 2 (1906: 161).
47 P.M. Kennedy (1980: 192–3).
48 Morier, the ambassador at St Petersburg, to Salisbury, 18 August 1887, cited in Greaves (1964: 110).
49 See 'Correspondence respecting the movements of Russia in Central Asia and her relations with Afghanistan from 1864 to 1881', IOL, Political and Secret Department, 8 February 1882; see also Greaves (1964: 103).
50 *The Times*, London, 6 May 1885, quoted in Greaves (1964: 105).
51 Brackenbury to Morier, 25 August 1891, Morier Papers, quoted in Martel (1986a: 70).
52 Salisbury's 'Message to Lord Rosebery on leaving the F.O.', 18 August 1892, in Bourne (1970: 432–3).

53 For the text see BDOW, vol. 8, no. 2.
54 As examples see Langer (1931/1950: 428); Robinson and Gallagher (1961: 264–5).
55 Robinson and Gallagher (1961: 267).
56 See Parliamentary Papers, Egypt no. 8 (1887), nos 45, 50, 54.
57 See Farnie (1969: 335–6).
58 Robinson and Gallagher (1961: 267).
59 See Langer (1931/1950: 434).
60 For the text see BDOW, vol. 8, no. 13.
61 For details see Langer (1931/1950: 434).
62 This was Salisbury's favourite argument. He maintained that Britain's popular and parliamentary institutions made it impossible for the British government to give any assurance, engagement, pledge or promise to go to war in the future. See C. Howard (1967: 76–7).
63 Salisbury to the Queen, 10 February 1887, PRO, Cab. 41/20/31.
64 C.J. Lowe (1965: 39).
65 P.M. Kennedy (1980: 195).
66 C.J. Lowe, vol. 2 (1967: 114).
67 Salisbury to the Queen, 10 February 1887, Cab. 41/20/31.
68 Farnie (1969: 335).
69 As reported by the German ambassador in London to Bismarck, 20 September 1886, cited in Robinson and Gallagher (1961: 261).
70 Cited in Gooch (1974: 10).
71 Hamilton to Salisbury, 5 February 1888, cited in Lowe, vol. 1 (1967: 159).
72 *Parliamentary Debates*, H.C., 15 March 1888, cols 1350–1.
73 See Marder (1940/1964: 141, 172–3).
74 See Hood Memorandum of July 1888, in C.J. Lowe, vol. 2 (1967: 81).
75 See Memorandum by H. Brackenbury (Intelligence Branch, War Office), 8 June 1888, PRO, Cab. 37/21/15 and memorandum by Hamilton, The Third Lord of Admiralty, 16 June 1888, Cab. 37/21/17.
76 Memorandum by Salisbury, 29 June 1888, Cab. 37/21/18.
77 Quoted in Friedberg (1988: 147).
78 Marder (1940/1964: 105–6).
79 C.J. Lowe (1965: 197).
80 See Carroll (1931/1934: 140–2).
81 Friedberg (1988: 146).
82 On this see P.M. Kennedy (1980: 190–1, 196); Bourne (1970: 149).
83 P.M. Kennedy (1980: 192).
84 The Chancellor perhaps hoped to get British support in his clash with the United States over Samoa, but London was even less keen on fighting the Americans than the French. See P.M. Kennedy (1980: 196–7).
85 Ibid.
86 Ibid., 196.
87 See Gorst and Johnson (1977: 3–5).
88 DMI Memorandum on Naval Policy, 13 October 1896, in Marder (1940/1964: 572, Appendix I).
89 British ambassador in London to Bismarck, 13 August 1886, cited in Robinson and Gallagher (1961: 261).
90 Robinson and Gallagher (1961: 254).
91 See P.M. Kennedy (1980: 184, 200).
92 Marder (1940/1964: 146).
93 Cited in Robinson and Gallagher (1961: 258).
94 For details see table, ibid., 276.
95 Cited in Cecil, vol. 4 (1932: 137–8).

96 For correspondence between Baring and Salisbury see F.O. 78/4243. Martel argues that control of the Sudan was not a vital British interest while supremacy in Egypt was. Martel (1986a: 20). Such distinction was not made by statesmen in 1890. For them, control over Sudan was essential if they wanted to hold onto Egypt.
97 See above, pp. 73–4.
98 The complex struggle for power has been graphically described by Sanderson (1965).
99 Ibid., pp. 94–5.
100 Its area is just 100 square kilometres.
101 Sanderson (1965: 292–5).
102 In terms of territory the British got 356,400 square miles (1000 + 110,300 + 245,100). See Davis and Huttenback (1986: 27–8).
103 Fergusson to Salisbury, 4 July 1890, 28, cited in Robinson and Gallagher (1961: 299).
104 *Parliamentary Debates*, H.C., vol. 347, cols 769–961.
105 See P.M. Kennedy (1979: 171).
106 C.J. Lowe (1965: 11); Pearce and Stewart (1992: 142, 163).
107 P.M. Kennedy (1980: 191).
108 See Salisbury's Memorandum for the Cabinet, 4 June 1892, PRO, Cab. 37/3/10. Also in Bourne (1970: 429–32).
109 Salisbury to the Queen, 22 August 1891, *Letters of Queen Victoria*, 3rd series, vol. II, 65.

5 Facing the Franco-Russian combine, 1892–8

1 Boisdeffre to Frecynet, 10 August 1892. Quoted in A.J.P. Taylor (1954/1971: 338).
2 Generally this is called the Franco-Russian Alliance of 1894, but sometimes the date given is 1893. On 27 December 1893 Giers, the Russian Foreign Minister, informed the French government that the Tsar had given approval to the Military Convention between them. The French sent their approval on 4 January 1894.
3 On this see C. Howard (1967: 43).
4 The Prince of Wales wrote to Rosebery on 11 August 1892: 'There are many grave questions…affecting our interests in India, Egypt and Morocco and it requires a very watchful eye – to prevent Russia and France from harming us – and a thorough knowledge of the subject which nobody possesses more than you do.' Robinson and Gallagher (1961: 321).
5 By this time Rosebery had emerged as the leader of the group that believed that Britain should maintain the traditional free trade system and thus preserve the independence of the money market on which Britain's predominance depended. He defined a 'Liberal Imperialist' as a person who was passionately attached to the empire and intensely interested in the best means of sustaining and promoting it. See Baumgart (1982: 166) and Martel (1986a: 15).
6 He formed a government composed of Conservatives and Liberal Unionists. Of the total of 670 seats, the Conservatives got 340 seats while the Liberal Unionists got 71 seats.
7 Steiner (1969: 23).
8 Hartington was made Duke of Devonshire in 1891.
9 Quoted in Martel (1986a: 221).
10 Quoted in P.M. Kennedy (1981: 105).
11 Quoted in B. Porter (1975: 127).
12 See PRO, Cab. 37/21/14, 15 and W.O. 106/48.
13 See Salisbury's Memorandum, 4 June 1892, PRO, Cab. 37/31/10; also in Bourne (1970: 429–32).
14 See Gillard (1967: 245).

15 See Martel (1986a: 257).
16 Preston (1977: 273).
17 J. Gooch (1974: 10–12).
18 Martel (1986a: 137).
19 This was stated by Salisbury in his Memorandum for the Cabinet, 4 June 1892, PRO, Cab. 37/31/10.
20 Ibid.
21 See P.M. Kennedy (1979: 219) and Martel (1986a: 257).
22 Marder (1940/1964: 180–5).
23 Friedberg (1985: 155).
24 See Sumida (1989: 10–12).
25 On this see Martel (1984: 387–404), also C.J. Lowe (1965).
26 Martel emphasises repeatedly that this was Rosebery's policy; see Martel (1986a: 82, 97, 157, 223–4, 259). But Rosebery was, in fact, continuing Salisbury's policy. See above, pp. 82, 98–9.
27 Martel (1991: 685).
28 P.M. Kennedy (1979: 171).
29 P.M. Kennedy (1980: 214–16).
30 See Cromer to Salisbury, 27 March 1896, Cromer Papers, PRO, F.O. 633/6. See also P.M. Kennedy (1980: 222).
31 On this see Klein (1968: 119–39).
32 Satow Diary, 25 July 1893, quoted in Martel (1986a: 31). Satow was the leading expert on Siamese affairs in the Foreign Office. See also Klein (1969: 125–6).
33 Colonial Office memorandum to Foreign Office, confdl, 22 June 1893, F.O. 17/1180.
34 On this issue see PRO, FO; Confdl Series, 422, Siam, vol. 36.
35 See, for example, Klein (1969: 127–8), Fieldhouse (1965: 229), Hall (1955/1994: 603).
36 Martel (1986a: 130–2).
37 This part of the conversation was not recorded officially. It is found in a letter written by Rosebery to Dufferin. On this see Martel (1980: 296–7).
38 Ibid.
39 Martel (1986a: 134). Martel, however, adds that references to Egypt in this despatch were removed.
40 On this issue see Klein (1969: 121–5).
41 Martel (1986a: 133).
42 Dufferin to Rosebery, 31 July and 9 August 1893, PRO, Cab. 37/34/42, 46. Frontier skirmishes and negotiations, however, continued. On this see Klein (1969: 119–36).
43 See Tuck (1995). This forms one of the central contentions of this book.
44 On this, see the minute on 'Military Needs of the Empire in a War with France and Russia', 10 August 1901, PRO, Cab. 48/1/6.
45 For example, see C.J. Lowe, vol. 1 (1967: 174).
46 Martel (1986a: 134).
47 Ibid.
48 See NAI, Foreign Department (Secret) Frontier Proceedings, September 1891, nos 280–319 and KW.
49 See Lansdowne to Kimberley, 5 October 1892, no. 48, Lansdowne Papers, Mss Eur. D. 558/5. See also Foreign Department (Secret) Frontier Proceedings, November 1891, no. 207; August 1892, nos 65–149; October 1892, nos 144–72.
50 See note by Lansdowne, 6 May 1893, Foreign Department (Secret) Frontier Proceedings, August 1893, nos 6–34. Also Lansdowne to Kimberley, 6 June 1893, Lansdowne Papers, Mss Eur. D. 558/5.
51 NAI, Foreign Department (Secret) External Proceedings, December 1891, nos 206–91.

52 Resistance of the Amir to British proposals is writ large in the correspondence that can be seen in the proceedings of the Foreign Department of the government of India relating to Afghanistan. For example Foreign Department (Secret) Frontier Proceedings, December 1891, nos 206–91; October 1891, nos 1–35.
53 See NAI, Foreign Department (Secret) Foreign Proceedings, July to December, vol. VI, no. 15.
54 IOL, Political and Secret Letters and Enclosures from India, vol. 62, 855–7.
55 Martel (1986a: 134).
56 Ibid., 69.
57 See Kimberley to Lansdowne, 26 August 1892, Lansdowne Papers, Mss Eur. D. 558/5. Hamilton Diary, 19 August 1892, cited in Martel (1986a: 72–3). Ripon was Secretary of State for Colonies at that time.
58 Martel (1986a: 72).
59 NAI, Foreign Department (Secret) Frontier proceedings, October 1892, nos 144–72, nos 144, 147, 150. See also Proceedings of April 1893, nos 69–71.
60 Rosebery to Howard, 24 August 1892, F.O. 65/1440, nos 154–6. Morier to Rosebery, Private, 2 September 1892, quoted in Martel (1986: 74).
61 Ibid., 74–5.
62 Lansdowne to Kimberley, 5 October 1892, Lansdowne Papers, Mss Eur. D. 558/5.
63 Martel (1986a: 75).
64 See PRO, War Office, Diary for July 1892, F.O. 65/1441. See also NAI, Foreign Department (Secret) Frontier Proceedings, September 1891, no. 109.
65 See memorandum on 'The Present Position in Central Asia' by H.M. Durand, 21 May 1887 and comments by Roberts on this, 13 June 1887, in NAI, Foreign Department (Secret) Frontier Proceedings, October 1887, nos 286–91. Lansdowne to Kimberley, 13 September 1892, Lansdowne Papers, Mss Eur. D. 558/5.
66 See NAI, Foreign Department (Secret) Frontier Proceedings, January 1894, nos 193–217.
67 Rosebery's speech at Lord Mayor's banquet on 9 November 1894, quoted in A.J.P. Taylor (1954/1971: 354).
68 See George White to Elgin, 3 May 1895, White Papers, Mss Eur. F. 108/20.
69 For details see Kanomori (1968: 386–404) and Huttenback (1971: 126–44). Salisbury's government decided to retain control over Chitral. It was absorbed directly into the Indian Empire when the North West Frontier Province was created in 1901.
70 See NAI, Foreign Department (Secret) Frontier Proceedings, July 1895, nos 891–933 and May 1896, nos 1–24.
71 C. Howard (1967: 42–3).
72 See above, p. 5.
73 Kimberley to Rosebery, 6 April 1895, quoted in Martel (1986a: 242).
74 Rosebery's memorandum, 30 July 1894; ibid., 217.
75 Kimberley to Rosebery, 18 May 1895; ibid., 250.
76 Rosebery's memorandum, 30 July 1894; ibid., 247.
77 Salisbury to Lascelles, British ambassador at St Petersburg, 2 July 1895, cited in Grenville (1964: 30).
78 Cited in K.M. Wilson (1987a: 15).
79 Grenville (1964: 29).
80 This could not be carried out because of one unexpected difficulty after another. See telegram from Salisbury to Sir Philip Currie, 5 August 1895, F.O. 78/4627.
81 See K.M. Wilson, 'Constantinople or Cairo: Lord Salisbury and the Partition of the Ottoman Empire, 1886–97', in K.M. Wilson (1987a: 9).
82 Ibid., 7.
83 Grenville (1964: 511–13).
84 On this see K.M. Wilson (1987a: 1).

85 Ibid., 3.
86 Grenville (1964: 24–5).
87 K.M. Wilson (1987a: 3–6).
88 Ibid.
89 Salisbury to the Queen, 19 February 1896, PRO, Cab. 41/23/20, 41.
90 Salisbury to Currie, 14 December 1895, cited in K.M. Wilson (1987a: 18).
91 Salisbury to Monson, 4 February 1896, BDOW, vol. 8, no. 1(f).
92 Salisbury to Currie, 18 February 1896, PRO, F.O. 407/136, quoted in K.M. Wilson (1987a: 8).
93 For the Greco-Turkish War of 1897 see Grenville (1964: 89–95).
94 Martel (1986a: 89).
95 See telegram from Arthur Hardinge, the First Secretary at Cairo, to Rosebery, confdl, 12 October 1892 and related correspondence in F.O. 78/4455.
96 Cited in C.J. Lowe, vol. 1 (1967: 171).
97 Martel says that he later regretted making this statement; Martel (1986a: 260). This phrase was quoted often for it seemed to sum up the scramble for territory that typified the 'new' imperialism.
98 See Sir Philip Currie to Morier, 2 December 1892, Morier Papers, quoted in Martel (1986a: 88).
99 Comment by Matthew, vol. 13 (1994: lxv).
100 See Robinson and Gallagher (1961: 326–30).
101 See G.M. Trevelyan (1937: 61).
102 See Robinson and Gallagher (1961: 326–30).
103 It is difficult to accept G.N. Sanderson's argument that the British decision of 11–12 March was a move in Salisbury's European diplomacy, a gesture to maintain friendly relations with the Triple Alliance; Sanderson (1965: 242–52).
104 Telegram from Salisbury to Monson, 2 December 1895, F.O. 78/4884.
105 See Wilson (1987: 23–4).
106 Salisbury to Cromer, 13 March 1896, quoted in Robinson and Gallagher (1961: 348–9).
107 The French Foreign Minister had accepted the plan to send Major Marchand on a 'peaceful' mission to Fashoda in November 1895. He was able to leave only in June 1896. The decision at London was taken independently. See Grenville (1964: 107–8).
108 See F.O. 78/4761.
109 Salisbury to the Queen, 29 September 1896, PRO, Cab. 41/23/41.
110 See Robinson and Gallagher (1961: 358).
111 Memorandum on Naval Policy by the Director of Naval Intelligence, 28 October 1896, Marder (1940/1964: 578–80, Appendix 4).
112 See Robinson and Gallagher (1961: 355).
113 K.M. Wilson (1987a: 24).
114 He wrote to Queen Victoria's Private Secretary, 'Our only chance is to keep the things quiet until our railway to Uganda is sufficiently far advanced to enable us to send troops by it', 5 December 1895, PRO, Cab. 41/22.
115 Sanderson (1965: 256).
116 See Beachey (1967: 237–54). Camels and bullocks for the expedition were acquired from Bombay.
117 Andrew and Kanya-Forstner (1975: 92).
118 Robinson and Gallagher (1961: 367).
119 *Parliamentary Debates*, H.C., 27 June 1898, vol. LX, cols 241–50.
120 Quoted in Grenville (1964: 122). On the Fashoda crisis see Bates (1984).
121 On this see Sanderson (1965: 350).
122 On this see Andrew and Kanya-Forstner (1965: 93).

123 The settlement could be reached only by March 1899. It was only a matter of recognising facts.
124 Amongst the politicians only Morley, and among the newspapers only the *Manchester Guardian*, stood out against this general line of approval. Robinson and Gallagher (1961: 377).
125 Cited in Sanderson (1965: 396).
126 See above, p. 74–5.
127 Quoted in Robinson and Gallagher (1961: 419).
128 See Cains and Hopkins (1993: 370–80).
129 Martel (1986a).

6 Seeking partnerships, 1898–1902

1 P.M. Kennedy (1988: 259).
2 P.M. Kennedy (1980: 231).
3 The decline of Britain has been one of the most debated issues in economic history. Almost all agree that, though Britain's power declined in relative terms, even in 1914 Britain was the pre-eminent Great Power. On this controversy see articles in *The International History Review*, vol. 13, 1991.
4 The classic study of this period is Monger (1963); on this issue, see chapter 1. For a comparatively recent study see Friedberg (1988).
5 They were Secretaries of State for Colonies, War and India respectively.
6 On this see Mahajan (1982: 168–92).
7 See Preston (1978: 254–80). Wolseley was Adjutant-General from 1885 to 1890 and held the Irish Command from 1890 to 1895.
8 BDOW, vol. 5, no. 272; also see above, pp. 104–5.
9 Neilson (1991: 714).
10 See Memorandum by Brackenbury, 25 January 1887, PRO, Cab. 37/19/8.
11 See Military Report on the Trans-Caspian Railway, June 1887, PRO, F.O., 65/1321.
12 See NAI, Foreign Department (Secret) Frontier Proceedings, April 1901, nos 25–44.
13 Quoted in Hinsley (1977: 135) and P.M. Kennedy (1983: 50).
14 Government of India to the Secretary of State for India, 6 July 1885, *Russo-Indian Relations in the Nineteenth Century: A Selection of Documents* 1999, no. 165.
15 Government of India to the Secretary of State for India, 14 July 1888, ibid., no. 168.
16 See *The Times of India*, Bombay, 27 December 1890, ibid., no. 134. Also see nos 131–3.
17 Ibid., nos 169–74.
18 Ibid.
19 See Hamilton to Curzon, 2 November 1899, Curzon Papers, F. 111/158, no. 60. Also Note by Altham, DAAG, Intelligence Division, 10 August 1901, para 42, PRO, W.O. 106/48/E3/2.
20 See Memorandum by Balfour, 30 April 1903, PRO, Cab. 6/1/12D.
21 Salisbury to Northcote (Governor of Bombay), Private, 8 June 1900, cited in Greaves (1959: 15–16).
22 Ibid.
23 Greaves (1959: 45).
24 See note on 'Advantage to Russia of a Railway to Seistan', 2 May 1904, PRO, Cab. 6/1/149D. See also note by Balfour, 24 November 1903, PRO, Cab. 38/3/73.
25 See Minutes of the 8th meeting of the Committee of Imperial Defence, 26 March 1903, PRO, Cab. 38/2/17.
26 Note on the 'Military Needs of the Empire in a War with France and Russia' by E.A. Altham, 10 August 1901, para 35, PRO, W.O. 106/48.

27 Papers laying down requirements for an army, 1 June 1891, Parliamentary Papers, C. 607.
28 Barnett (1970: 334).
29 For deployment of the infantry battalions of the British regular army in 1899 see Friedberg (1988: 277, Table 5.1).
30 P.M. Kennedy (1979: 102).
31 See Curzon Papers, IOL, Mss Eur. F. 111/285.
32 Preston (1978: 268).
33 Friedberg (1988: 234).
34 Despatch from the government of India, 26 April 1900, no. 58, PRO, CID Papers, Cab. 38/1/7; BDOW, vol. 6, no. 465.
35 Despatch from the government of India, 20 September 1900, no. 137, PRO, CID Papers, Cab. 38/1/7.
36 Memorandum by Altham, 10 August 1901, PRO, W.O. 106/48.
37 Report of the committee appointed to consider the military defence of India, 24 December 1901, PRO, Cab. 6/1/6D.
38 Memorandum by Balfour, 3 July 1903, PRO, Cab. 6/1/28D.
39 Monger (1963: 8–9).
40 See memorandum by Selborne, 17 January 1901, quoted in ibid., 11.
41 Friedberg (1988: 137).
42 Selborne to Curzon, 4 January 1903, Curzon Papers, Mss Eur. F. 111/229.
43 J. Gooch (1974: 22).
44 Friedberg (1988: 256).
45 Letter from the Treasury to the War Office, 3 November 1904, Arnold-Forster Papers, BL, Add. Mss 50311, 185.
46 Despatch from the government of India, no. 18, 2 August 1902, CID Papers, Cab. 38/1/10.
47 Curzon to Hamilton, 24 September 1902, Curzon Papers, Mss Eur. F. 111/161, no. 82.
48 On this see Chandra (1966: 586–601).
49 Ibid.
50 Curzon to Hamilton, 7 May 1903, Mss Eur. F. 111/161, no. 30.
51 Wilkinson (1998: 99).
52 See note on ‘Successive Demands for Reinforcements by the Government of India’, PRO, Cab. 6/3/91D.
53 Report of the Committee appointed to consider the Military Defence of India, 24 December 1901, PRO, CID Papers, Cab. 38/1/7.
54 Minute by E. Peach, 31 May 1901, W.O. 106/48/E3/2.
55 See W.O. 106/48/E3/2.
56 Letter from Balfour, 25 August 1904, Balfour Papers, BL, Add. Mss 49728.
57 See Balfour to Lansdowne, 21 December 1903, ibid.
58 J. Gooch (1974: 181).
59 Memorandum by E.A. Altham, ‘Military Needs of the Empire in a War with France and Russia’, 10 August 1901, para 10, W.O. 106/48/E3/2.
60 Minute by Curzon, 18 May 1898, PRO, F.O. 60/601.
61 See Monger (1963: 216).
62 See despatch from the government of India, Foreign Department (Secret) Frontier Proceedings, no. 86, 11 May 1899, Curzon Papers, Mss Eur. F. 111/287.
63 Curzon to Hamilton, 2 February 1899 and Abdur Rahman to Curzon, 4 April 1899, Curzon Papers, Mss Eur. F. 111/158, no. 34 and F. 111/287.
64 Memorandum to Salisbury, 6 February 1900, Appendix II to note on ‘Direct Relations between Russia and Afghanistan’, IOL, Letters/Political & Secret/10/125, no. 3082. Also see BDOW, vol. 4, no. 465.

65 Curzon to Hamilton, 25 February 1900, Curzon Papers, Mss Eur. F. 111/159, no. 10.
66 See despatch from the government of India, Foreign Department (Secret) Frontier Proceedings, no. 166, 1 September 1904, NAI, Foreign Department (Secret) Frontier Proceedings, nos 233–71, nos 234 and 236. Also see Mahajan (1980: 175–92).
67 Before becoming governor-general, Curzon had published *Persia and the Persian Question* and *Russia in Central Asia*. See also Steiner (1969: 237).
68 Foreign Policy Memorandum on British Policy in Persia, 31 October 1905, BDOW, vol. 4, no. 321.
69 Quoted in Cain and Hopkins (1993: 415).
70 The King did not want to give Garter to a non-Christian. He agreed only when Lansdowne threatened to resign. See Steiner (1969: 204, footnote on 236).
71 Hamilton to Curzon, 6 January 1903, Curzon Papers, Mss Eur. F. 111/162.
72 See Cain and Hopkins (1993: 411–15).
73 Balfour to Lansdowne, 6 September 1902, PRO, F.O. 60/657.
74 Hardinge to Grey, 23 December 1905, BDOW, vol. 4, no. 322.
75 For this see NAI, Foreign Department (Secret) Frontier Proceedings, March 1901, no. 57.
76 This was the conclusion of the exhaustive War Office survey entitled 'The Military Resources of the Russian Empire' prepared in 1907, PRO, W.O. 33/419.
77 McDermott (1979: 102).
78 Ibid.
79 Williamson (1969).
80 Quoted in Monger (1963: 16).
81 Ibid., 17.
82 Grenville (1964: 137).
83 Otte (1995: 1160); see also Grenville (1964: 143).
84 Grenville (1964: 131).
85 Salisbury to O'Connor, telegram, 17 January 1898, BDOW, vol. 1, no. 5.
86 Salisbury to O'Connor, 25 January 1898, ibid., no. 8.
87 See Grenville (1964: 142).
88 Balfour to the Queen, telegram, 26 March 1898, PRO, Cab. 41/42/34.
89 *Parliamentary Debates*, H.C., 5 April 1878, cited in Grenville (1964: 145).
90 Grenville (1964: 138–42).
91 Sanderson to Salisbury, 19 November 1897, Sanderson Papers, PRO, F.O. 800/2. The China Association was the pressure group of British merchants engaged in China trade.
92 Ibid.
93 See Grenville (1964: ch. 7).
94 Ibid., 170.
95 See Herwig (1991: 221–440). See also P.M. Kennedy (1980: 224–30, 424–5).
96 Chamberlain's confidential memorandum 'The South African Situation', 6 September 1899, PRO, Confidential Papers Cab. 37/50/70, printed in Bourne (1970: 460–1).
97 See note entitled 'Russia: Increase in Military Force in Central Asia during the Boer War', 5 February 1900, PRO, 30/40/14/2.
98 Godley to Curzon, 28 February 1902, Curzon Papers, Mss Eur. F. 111/161, no. 22.
99 P.M. Kennedy (1980: 242).
100 Hamilton to Curzon, 9 February 1900, Curzon Papers, Mss Eur. F. 111/145.
101 Godley to Curzon, 8 February 1900, ibid.
102 See Grenville (1964: 354).
103 Lansdowne's 'very secret' memorandum, 11 November 1901, Bourne (1970: 469–71).

104 Steiner (1969: 51).
105 The Hay-Pauncefote Treaty of 1901 can be looked upon as a recognition that Britain could no longer afford to count the United States among its potential enemies and that it must concede naval as well as military supremacy on the American continent to the United States.
106 Hamilton to Curzon, 25 May 1901, Curzon Papers, Mss Eur. F. 111/161, no. 33.
107 Same to same, 9 February 1900, ibid., F. 111/145.
108 Memorandum by Chamberlain, 10 February 1900, PRO, Cab. 37/53/65.
109 Ibid.
110 See P.M. Kennedy (1980: 243). The Germans were later able to insist that Manchuria was not covered by this agreement. In fact, in the German diplomatic documents, it is referred to as 'the Yangtse Treaty'. See Grenville (1964: 318).
111 Cited in Monger (1963: 21).
112 See Marquess of Lansdowne to Sir C. MacDonald reporting his conversation with Hayashi, 19 March 1901 and MacDonald to Lansdowne, 22 March 1901 reporting his conversation with the Japanese Foreign Minister, BDOW, vol. 2, nos 60 and 61 respectively.
113 See BDOW, vol. 2, no. 99.
114 Balfour to Lansdowne, 12 December 1901, Balfour Papers, BL, Add. Mss 49727. Also Memorandum by F. Bertie, 11 March 1901, BDOW, vol. 2, no. 54.
115 See Monger (1963: 31–4).
116 Memorandum by Lansdowne, 25 October 1901, PRO, F.O. 17/1510 and C.Hardinge to Lansdowne, 4 November 1901, F.O. 65/1623.
117 As reported by Lansdowne to Lascelles, 18 March 1901, BDOW, vol. 2, no. 77.
118 Ibid.
119 Grenville (1964: 345).
120 Ibid., 351.
121 Hamilton to Curzon, 25 April 1901, Curzon Papers, Mss Eur. F. 111/146.
122 Memorandum by Salisbury on Anglo-German understanding, 29 May 1901, BDOW, vol. 2, no. 86.
123 Salisbury to Curzon, 17 October 1900, Curzon Papers, Mss Eur. F. 111/70.
124 See Lansdowne to Whitehead (British Charge D'Affairs at Tokyo), 31 July 1901, BDOW, vol. 2, no. 102.
125 See, for example, Lansdowne's letter to Lascelles reporting his conversation with Eckardstein, 18 March 1901, BDOW, vol. 2, no. 77. Copies of this letter were sent to Salisbury, Balfour, Devonshire and Chamberlain.
126 Steiner (1969: 64).
127 'Balance of Naval Power in the Far East', Memorandum by Selborne, 4 September 1901, PRO, Cab. 37/58/87.
128 See Grenville (1964: 412–14).
129 Monger (1963: 59).
130 Balfour to Lansdowne, 12 December 1901, Balfour Papers, Add. Mss 49727. See also Mahajan (1982: 169).
131 Hamilton to Curzon, 13 February 1902, Curzon Papers, Ms Eur. F. 111/162.
132 See Nish (1966: 204–10).
133 Ibid., 181–2.
134 P.M. Kennedy (1980: 249).
135 Nish (1966: 163–74).
136 For drafts and the text of the Anglo-Japanese Agreement see BDOW, vol. 2, no. 125.
137 M. Howard (1967: 94).
138 Memorandum by Lansdowne, 11 November 1901, BDOW, vol. 2, no. 92. Also see Lansdowne to Balfour, 12 December 1901, Balfour Papers, BL, Add. Mass 49727.
139 See Monger (1963: 47), also Martel (1991: 684).

140 Chamberlain (1988: 10, 162).
141 P.M. Kennedy (1980: 231).
142 BDOW, vol. 2, no. 92.
143 Ibid., no. 94.
144 P.M. Kennedy (1980: 186, 226).
145 Grenville (1964: 344).
146 Lansdowne to Lascelles, 18 March 1901, BDOW, vol. 2, no. 77; also Monger (1963: 48).
147 Quoted in Monger (1963: 23). See also Minute by William II, 7 April 1898, quoted in A.J.P. Taylor (1954: 377).

7 Russia: a friend at last, 1902–7

1 For instance, Monger says that the most important event of Lansdowne's period was the estrangement from Germany; Monger (1963: 234). P.M. Kennedy describes the period from 1902 to 1906 as 'The Flowering of the Antagonism'; Kennedy (1980, the title of chapter 14). See also Steiner (1977: 245).
2 P.M. Kennedy (1980: 267).
3 BDOW, vol. 2, nos 171, 180. For a summary of this affair see Monger (1963: 104–7).
4 Hamilton to Curzon, 31 December 1902, Hamilton Papers, C. 126/4.
5 Monger (1963: 107).
6 See memorandum by Lansdowne, 17 April 1903, PRO, F.O. 800/145.
7 See Francis (1973: 168–78).
8 Monger (1963: 121).
9 Friedberg (1988: 83).
10 P.M. Kennedy (1980: 251).
11 Quoted in Monger (1963: 69).
12 P.M. Kennedy (1980: 251).
13 Sir Eyre Crowe, who was to become a very influential Foreign Office official and was later regarded as an extreme Germanophobe, was one of these. On this see P.M. Kennedy (1980: 254).
14 McDermott (1979: 100).
15 In 1910 its composition was changed considerably. For details see d'Ombrian (1973: Appendix I).
16 Johnson (1960). Also see d'Ombrian (1973: 169).
17 McDermott (1972: 169).
18 d'Ombrian (1973: 1).
19 On this see McDermott (1979: 115, n. 38).
20 Kitchen (1996: 3).
21 Minutes of the first meeting of the Committee of Imperial Defence, 18 December 1902, PRO, CID Papers, Cab. 38/1/13.
22 See J. Gooch (1974: 203–4).
23 See PRO, Cab. 6/1/45D.
24 Minutes of 32nd meeting, 2 March 1904, PRO, CID Papers, Cab. 38/4/10.
25 Minutes of 33rd meeting, 4 March 1904, ibid., Cab. 38/4/12.
26 Minutes of 57th meeting, 16 November 1904, ibid., Cab. 38/6/117.
27 See telegram from Curzon, 4 January 1905, PRO, Cab. 6/3/91D.
28 War Office comments on 'Memorandum' by Curzon and Kitchener, 11 November 1903, PRO, CID Papers, Cab. 38/3/70.
29 Ibid. See also Cab. 38/1/12 and 38/2/22.
30 See Scheme for the Redistribution of the Army in India, PRO, Cab. 38/1/126.
31 Note on the Military Policy of India, 19 July 1905, Kitchener Papers, PRO, 30/57.
32 Ibid.

33 On this see Friedberg (1988: 256, 276).
34 Notes on Military Strategy in a War with France and Russia combined, 1905, PRO, W.O. 106/48/E3/3, 87.
35 Memorandum on the Despatch of Reinforcements from U. K. to India, PRO, Cab. 6/1/15D.
36 See J. Gooch (1974: 182).
37 Explanatory notes on the Memorandum on the Defence of India, 10 March 1903, PRO, CID Papers, Cab. 38/2/18.
38 Supplies in Afghanistan, ibid., Cab. 38/6/91.
39 Memorandum on the Provisional Report of the Committee on Indian Defence by Curzon, 7 August 1903, ibid., Cab. 48/3/66.
40 Balfour to Curzon, 3 November 1904, Balfour Papers, Add. Mss 49733, 175–6.
41 Quoted in Neilson (1991: 714).
42 On this see Lambert (1995: 597).
43 See 'Failed Schemes' and 'Approved Schemes', Arnold-Forster Papers, BL, Add. Mss 50301 and 50302.
44 See 'Army Re-organization: Correspondence between the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for War', PRO, Cab. 37/74/10.
45 For details see NAI, Foreign Department (Secret) Frontier Proceedings, May 1899, nos 334–9 and May 1905, nos 448–557. See also Curzon to Hamilton, 18 February 1899, Hamilton Papers, Mss Eur. D. 510/2.
46 Curzon to Dane, 9 December 1904, NAI, Foreign Department (Secret) Frontier Proceedings, January 1904, nos 34–136, 57. See also Balfour to Brodrick, 17 December 1903, Balfour Papers, BL, Add. Mss 49720.
47 See NAI, Foreign Department (Secret) Frontier Proceedings, October 1904, nos 233–71 and May 1905, nos 1–141.
48 Note by Brodrick, 12 August 1905, Morley Papers, Mss Eur. D. 573/37.
49 See Hinsley (1977: 142–3).
50 Grey to Spring-Rice, 12 June 1907, BDOW, vol. 4, no. 421.
51 Despatch from the government of India to the Secretary of State for India, 8 January 1903, Parliamentary Papers, C. 1920 (1903), 155–6.
52 Balfour to the King, 19 February 1903, PRO, Cab. 41/28/2.
53 See Parliamentary Papers, C. 1920 (1903).
54 See Addy (1984: 95–99); Lamb (1960/1986: 225–32).
55 See report on this meeting by Balfour to the King, 19 February 1903, PRO, Cab. 41/48/2. See also Cab. 41/32/65.
56 Lansdowne to Spring-Rice, 10 May 1904, BDOW, vol. 4, no. 291.
57 Balfour to the King, 19 February 1903, PRO, Cab. 41/48/2.
58 Quoted in Mahajan (1982: 185).
59 Lansdowne to Spring-Rice, 7 November 1903, BDOW, vol. 4, no. 258.
60 Steiner (1969: 237).
61 Spring-Rice to Louis Mallet, 13 April 1904, Lansdowne Papers, PRO, F.O. 800/141.
62 P.M. Kennedy (1980: 278). For 'for imperial defence considerations' read 'for the defence of the Indian Empire' – author.
63 Hamilton to Curzon, 6 January 1903, Hamilton Papers, Mss Eur. C. 126/5.
64 Sanderson (1965: 380).
65 Cromer Papers, PRO, F.O. 663/6. It contains many letters from Cromer on this theme. Also see BDOW, vol. 2, ch. XV.
66 A treaty on these issues was signed on 14 October 1903. BDOW, vol. 2, nos 289 and 318.
67 Sir C. MacDonald to Lansdowne, 27 April 1903, BDOW, vol. 2, no. 226.
68 See Monger (1963: 127–9).

69 Selborne to Balfour, 21 December 1903, Balfour Papers, BL, Add. Mss 49728. See also Lansdowne to Monson, ambassador at Paris, 11 December 1903, BDOW, vol. 2, no. 259.
70 For text of the Anglo-French entente see BDOW, vol. 2, no. 417.
71 For opinions of Selborne, Lansdowne and Chamberlain see Selborne to Lansdowne, 21 December 1903; Lansdowne to Balfour, 22 December 1903; and Chamberlain to Lansdowne, 21 December 1903. All in Balfour Papers, BL, Add. Mss 49728.
72 Quoted in Monger (1963: 149). Also see Nish (1985: 223–4).
73 Knollys to the King, 28 December 1903, Balfour Papers, BL, Add. Mss 49683.
74 On this see Monger (1963: 148–52).
75 Knollys to Balfour, undated, Balfour Papers, BL, Add. Mss 49683.
76 Balfour to Lansdowne, 31 December 1903, ibid., 49728.
77 Spring-Rice to Louis Mallet, 13 April 1904, Lansdowne Papers, F.O. 800/115.
78 See Monger (1963: 152–3).
79 Britain observed restraint on issues relating to Russia's Black Sea fleet, the question of contraband and the volunteer fleet. See Neilson (1989: 63–87).
80 See Monger (1963: 172–5).
81 See Neilson (1989: 67).
82 Balfour to Curzon, 3 November 1904, Balfour Papers, BL, Add. Mss 49738.
83 See BDOW, vol. 4, Editors' Note, p. 11 and ch. 5.
84 Ian Nish states that there were abundant reasons why Britain did not support Roosevelt, but he does not go into the question; Nish (1966: 297).
85 Brodrick to Ampthill, 17 March 1905, Ampthill Papers, Mss Eur. E. 233.
86 Balfour to Lansdowne, 24 January 1905, Balfour Papers, Add. Mss 49729.
87 For the views of the government of India see Report of the Sub-Committee on the Military Requirements of the Empire, 1 May 1907, PRO, CID, Cab. 38/13/20. For the opinions of Hardinge and MacDonald see BDOW, vol. 4, nos 26 and 117 respectively.
88 Minutes of the 70th meeting, 12 April 1905, PRO, Cab. 38/9/32.
89 Memorandum by C.L. Ottley, 8 April 1904, PRO, Cab. 17/67.
90 'Note on Future Relations of Great Britain and Japan', 4 May 1905, Sydenham Papers, BL, Add. Mss 50836.
91 Both Monger and Nish agree on this. Monger (1963: 193); Nish (1966: 312).
92 Balfour to Lansdowne, 30 June 1905, Balfour Papers, BL, Add. Mss 49729.
93 See K.M. Wilson (1992: 336).
94 See D.E. Kaiser (1983: 442).
95 P.M. Kennedy (1980: 275–8).
96 Steiner (1977: 39).
97 See Balfour Papers, BL, Add. Mss 49711.
98 For details see Monger (1963: 266–80).
99 See Marder (1979: 81–2).
100 On this see McDermott (1979: 109–11).
101 See Minutes of the 77th meeting of the CID, 26 July 1905, PRO, Cab. 38/9/65.
102 See Clarke to Balfour, 17 August and 17 September 1905, Balfour Papers, Add. Mss 49702.
103 McDermott (1979: 109).
104 See the paper entitled 'Violation of the Neutrality of Belgium during a Franco-German War', 29 September 1905, PRO, CID Papers, Cab. 38/10/73.
105 For a full discussion of this issue see Monger (1963: 236–56).
106 Clarke to Balfour, 14 October 1905, Balfour Papers, BL, Add. Mss 49702.
107 See K.M. Wilson (1981: 34).
108 Grey to Knollys, 28 March 106, Grey Papers, F.O. 800/103.
109 Klein (1971: 127).

110 See Nicolson to Grey, 29 May 1906, BDOW, vol. 4, no. 221.
111 Memorandum by Baron Nish for the Anglo-Japanese Conference, 29 May 1907, W.O. 106/48, 268–70.
112 Nish (1966: 300–09).
113 See Conclusions of the Anglo-Japanese Conference, 6 June 1907, W.O. 106/48.
114 Quoted in K.M. Wilson (1992: 353).
115 Kitchen (1996: 15).
116 Report of the Sub-Committee on the Military Requirements of the Empire, 1 May 1907, PRO, CID Cab. 38/13/20.
117 Morley to Minto, 19 September 1907, Morley Papers, Mss Eur. D. 573/2. See also Morley to Campbell-Bannerman, 6 January 1907, Cab. 38/13/20.
118 War Office, 'The Military Resources of the Russian Empire', 1907, PRO, W.O. 33/419, p. 295.
119 Morley to Minto, 9 March 1906 and 31 May 1907, Morley Papers, D. 573/1, 2.
120 Quoted in K.M. Wilson (1981: 36).
121 Spring-Rice to Sir Edward Grey, 26 January 1906, BDOW, vol. 4, no. 208.
122 Nicolson to Grey, 19 February 1907, IOL, Letters/Political and Secret/10/125.
123 J. Gooch (1974: 237).
124 Nicolson to Grey, 20 March 1937, BDOW, vol. 4, no. 256.
125 Quoted in K.M. Wilson (1981: 36).
126 NAI, Foreign Department (Secret) External Proceedings, May 1913, nos 261–502.
127 For the text of the Treaty see BDOW, vol. 4, Appendix I, 618–20.
128 See Foreign Office memorandum respecting the Anglo-Russian Convention, 29 January 1908, BDOW, vol. 4, no. 549.
129 BDOW, vol. 4, Appendix I, 618–19.
130 Ibid.
131 Hinsley (1977: 146).
132 A declaration to this effect was published in the Convention. BDOW, vol. 4, no. 455.
133 See Kent (1984: 82); also see Neilson (1989).
134 See Kent (1977: 156).
135 Monger (1963: 234).
136 Ibid., 293.
137 Steiner (1977: 82).
138 Monger (1963: 330).
139 Ibid., 234.
140 Ibid., 233.
141 Memorandum by Grey, 20 February 1906, BDOW, vol. 3, no. 299.
142 K.M. Wilson (1981: 37).
143 Quoted in K.M. Wilson (1987a: 150).
144 Grey, vol. 1 (1925: 165–6).

8 Nurturing the entente, 1907–14

1 This forms the main theme in the treatises of Steiner (1977) and P.M. Kennedy (1980).
2 J. Gooch (1974: 165); Gillard (1977: 176); also P.M. Kennedy (1980: 441–2); Steiner (1977: 82).
3 Cited in Herwig (1991: 275).
4 K.M. Wilson (1987b: 188). See also p. 185.
5 See Harcourt to Grey, 8, 9, 14 January 1914, Grey Papers, PRO, F.O. 800/91.
6 Nicolson to O'Beirne, 9 and 22 November 1910, Nicolson Papers, PRO, F.O. 800/344. See also K.M. Wilson (1987b: 192).
7 Grey to Hardinge, 28 January 1912, Hardinge Papers, vol. 92; Grey to Buchanan, 20 February 1912, Grey Papers, PRO, F.O. 800/74.

8 Grey to Hardinge, 28 January 1912, Hardinge Papers, vol. 92. Also BDOW, vol. 6, no. 425.
9 For example, see Spring-Rice to Grey, 16 July 1907 and notes by Grey and Hardinge on this, PRO, F.O. 371/26042; Grey to Nicolson, 5 October 1908, BDOW, vol. 5, no. 301; Note by Grey on Kerr to Grey, 30 March 1911, Grey Papers, PRO, F.O. 800/108; Nicolson to Buchanan, 22 October 1912, Carnock Papers, PRO, F.O. 800/359.
10 Steiner (1977: 82).
11 K.M. Wilson (1981: 26).
12 See Grey to Goschen, 16 December 1910, BDOW, vol. 6, no. 425.
13 Nicolson to Townley, 7 April 1914, Nicolson Papers, PRO, F.O. 800/365.
14 Cited in French (1986: 3).
15 For reaction to the dreadnought revolution in Germany, see Herwig (1991: 221–40).
16 Monger (1963: 267).
17 Grey to Bertie, 26 August 1908, vol. 6, no. 120.
18 Minute by Grey on Bertie to Grey, 22 November 1907, BDOW, vol. 6, no. 73.
19 Marder, vol. 1 (1961: 182–5, 283). However, this was made public only in 1912.
20 For opposition from the political left see Semmel (1986), also P.M. Kennedy (1980: 454–55).
21 Quoted in Marder , vol. 1 (1961: 151).
22 See K.M. Wilson (1985: 7).
23 Neilson (1991: 696–725).
24 Steiner (1977: 98–9).
25 See Neilson (1991: 704–5).
26 On this see Sweet and Langhorne (1977: 245).
27 Hardinge to Goschen, 7 April 1908, Hardinge Papers, vol. 13.
28 On this issue see Anderson (1966: 279–83).
29 Hardinge to Nicolson, 13 October 1908, BDOW, vol. 5, no. 372.
30 Ibid. See also nos 338, 349.
31 See Grey to Riffat Pasha, 10 February 1909, BDOW, vol. 6, no. 269; vol. 5, Appendix III. See also PRO, F.O. 371/733.
32 Quoted in Heller (1983: 21). See also minute by Grey, 7 August 1908, PRO, F.O. 371/545.
33 See Steiner (1977: 89).
34 Grey to Nicolson, 10 November 1908, BDOW, vol. 5, no. 441. Also Hardinge to Nicolson, 1 November 1908, Hardinge Papers, vol. 13.
35 Grey to F. Cartwright, Ambassador at Vienna, 1 May 1909, BDOW, vol. 9(2), no. 926. See also no. 626.
36 Grey to Nicolson, 10 November 1908, BDOW, vol. 5, no. 441.
37 Ibid.
38 Steiner (1977: 52); P.M. Kennedy (1980: 446).
39 Quoted in K.M. Wilson (1985: 79). See also BDOW, vol. 10(1), no. 914.
40 P.M. Kennedy (1980: 448).
41 Asquith to the King, 19 July 1911, PRO, Cab. 41/33/22. See also Bertie to Grey, 18 July 1911, BDOW, vol. 7, no. 392.
42 Hinsley (1977: 278).
43 See Grey to Goschen, 27 September 1911, appended by editors to Goschen to Nicolson, 22 September 1911, BDOW, vol. 7, no. 564. See also Memorandum by Grey, 20 February 1906, BDOW, vol. 3, no. 299.
44 See Minutes of 114th Meeting: Action to be taken in the event of intervention in a European War, 23 August 1911, PRO, CID, Cab. 38/19/49.
45 On this see S.R. Williamson (1969: ch. 6).
46 K.M. Wilson (1987b: 181).

47 On this issue see K.M. Wilson, 'The Opposition and Crisis in the Liberal Cabinet over Foreign Policy of November 1911', in Wilson (1987b: 110–25).
48 Diary of Lord Haldane's visit to Berlin, 9 February 1912, BDOW, vol. 6, no. 506. See also Fischer (1975: 130).
49 Grey to Bertie, 7 February 1912, BDOW, vol. 6, no. 499.
50 Minutes of 116th Meeting, 25 April 1912, PRO, CID, 38/20/9. Also notes prepared by the General Staff, 9 May 1912, Cab. 38/20/16.
51 See Nicolson to Grey, 6 May 1912, BDOW, vol. 10(2), no. 385.
52 See K.M. Kennedy (1976: 222–7), and Williamson (1969: 279–83).
53 Minutes of the 117th Meeting, 4 July 1912, Note on 'Strategic Position in the Mediterranean', PRO, CID, 38/20/26 and 'Memorandum on the Effects of British Evacuation of the Mediterranean on Questions of Foreign Policy', 8 May 1912, BDOW, vol. 9, no. 386.
54 On this see Hinsley (1985: 861–2).
55 For an interesting and comprehensive discussion on this issue see Maurer (1992: 102–27).
56 Ibid., 117. See also Buchanan to Grey, 25 June 1914, BDOW, vol. 10(2), no. 556.
57 Lister to Grey, 25 February 1907, PRO, F.O. 371/267/6314.
58 See Minutes by Hardinge and Grey on Goschen to Grey, 16 April 1909, BDOW, vol. 6, no. 174. See also Memorandum by Hardinge on the Possibility of War [no date], April 1909, BDOW, vol. 5, Appendix III, 823–6.
59 See Lowe and Dockrill, vol. 1 (1972: 107).
60 Nicolson to Lowther, 4 February 1913, PRO, F.O. 800/193.
61 Asquith to Grey, 4 November 1912, Grey Papers, PRO, F.O. 800/100.
62 On this issue see K.M. Wilson, 'The British Demarche of 3 and 4 December 1912: H.A. Gwynne's note on Britain, Russia and the First Balkan War', in K.M. Wilson (1987a: 140–8).
63 K.M. Wilson (1985: 92).
64 Ibid., 98.
65 On this see Rohl (1969: 661–3).
66 See K.M. Wilson (1987a: 140–8).
67 For a summary of tangled events and decisions see Anderson (1966/1970: 292–7).
68 See Grey to Cartwright, 1 May 1913, BDOW, vol. 9(2), no. 926; also Steiner (1977: 113).
69 Memorandum by Hardinge on the Possibility of War, undated, April 1909, BDOW, vol. 5, Appendix III, 823–6. For opinions of Asquith and Grey see PRO, F.O. 371/733.
70 Klein (1971: 126–47).
71 The phrase was used by Morley; cited in Wolpert (1967: 90–1).
72 Minto to Morley, 12 June 1906, Minto Papers, M-1006.
73 See Hinsley (1977: 236–7).
74 Ibid., 250.
75 On this see Kent (1977: 162–3).
76 Grey to Buchanan, 18 March 1914, Grey Papers, F.O. 800/74. See also Morley to Minto, 10 September 1908, Minto Papers, M-1009.
77 On this see NAI, Foreign Department (Secret) External Proceedings, January 1913, nos 11–71.
78 India Office to Foreign Office, 13 December 1909, IOL, Letters/Political and Secret/10/334. See also NAI, Foreign Department (Secret) External Proceedings, February 1909, nos 777–805, Proceeding no. 793. In Indian history, the 'constitutional' changes introduced during this period are known as 'Morley-Minto Reforms'. On this see Wolpert (1967).
79 In his magisterial work *The McMahon Line* (1966), Alastair Lamb discusses the relations of the government of India with the states on the northern frontier in the

context of Sino-Indian relations. But it was the attitude of the government at London towards Russia that formed the basis of these relations. Only on questions relating to boundary disputes on the foothills of Assam and on the Burmese border was the government of India allowed to assert itself. On these issues see Klein (1971).

80 The Tashi Lama (also called Panchen Lama) is the Tibetan monk second in importance only to the Dalai Lama.

81 See NAI, Foreign Department (Secret) External Proceedings, May 1907, nos 101–4. See also telegram from the Governor-General to the Secretary of State for India, 2 February 1907, and Morley to Minto, 8 February 1907, Private, Minto Papers, M-1007.

82 For the Anglo-Chinese Convention of 1906 see BDOW, vol. 4, nos 298 and 305. Also Morley to Grey, 2 January 1908, Grey Papers, F.O. 800/97; Morley to Minto, 3 January 1908, Minto Papers, M-1007.

83 See NAI, Foreign Department (Secret) External Proceedings, May 1907, nos 101–4.

84 See PRO, F.O. 535, vol. 14. Also Bryce to Grey 17 December 1908, F.O. 535, vol. 12.

85 Morley to Minto, 3 March 1910, Minto Papers, M-1010.

86 Klein (1971: 130).

87 Dalai Lama to the Viceroy, 29 March 1913, NAI, Foreign Department (Secret) External Proceedings, May 1913, no. 244.

88 Note by L.W. Reynolds, 2 April 1913, NAI, Foreign Department (Secret) External Proceedings, May 1913, nos 261–502, 36.

89 Klein (1971: 139).

90 See notes in NAI, Foreign Department (Secret) External Proceedings, July 1913, nos 199–239. For the text of this treaty see J.N. Jordon, British Minister at Peking, to the government of India forwarding the copy of the Tibetan Mongolian Treaty signed at Urga on 11 January 1913, ibid., proceeding no. 226.

91 See NAI, Foreign Department (Secret) External Proceedings, June 1914, nos 151–7.

92 Crowe to Hardinge, 14 December 1913, Hardinge Papers, vol. 119, Jordon to Langley, 13 November 1913 and Jordon to Grey, 6 November 1913, PRO, F.O. 535/16. Hardinge to Crowe, 11 December 1913, Hardinge Papers, vol. 119.

93 Governor-General to the Secretary of State for India, 11 January 1913, NAI, Foreign Department (Secret) External Proceedings, May 1913, no. 272.

94 Hardinge to Crowe, 21 June 1914, Hardinge Papers, vol. 120.

95 Enclosure to Hardinge to Crowe, 23 July 1914, ibid.

96 On this see PRO, F.O. 535/17.

97 See Buchanan, British Ambassador at St Petersburg, to Grey, 17 and 19 May 1914, ibid.

98 Buchanan to Grey, 19 May 1914, ibid.

99 IOL, Letters/Political and Secret/10/450/1187. See also Grey to Crowe, 21 March 1914, Crowe Papers, C/17.

100 Nicolson to Grey, 15 February 1912, Nicolson to Goschen, 11 March 1913, Nicolson Papers, F.O. 800/353, 364.

101 On this see K.M. Wilson (1981: 38–9).

102 Nicolson to Grey, 15 April 1912, BDOW, vol. 6, no. 575. See also Nicolson to Goschen, 15 April 1912, Carnock Papers, F.O. 800/351.

103 See Grey to Buchanan, 10 June 1914, BDOW, vol. 10(2), nos 547, 556 and 561. See also Buchanan to Grey, 25 June 1914, Grey Papers, F.O. 800/74.

104 See Steiner (1977: 119–20).

105 For example, see Holland (1991: 48).

106 Marder, vol. 1 (1940/1964: 429); K.M. Kennedy (1980: 453).

107 See Berghahn (1982: 20–3).

108 BDOW, vol. 10(2), no. 456.

109 On the issue of Portuguese colonies, see Lowe and Dockhill, vol. 1 (1972: 124–7).
110 On the issue of Baghdad Railway see Kent (1984: 117).
111 For negotiations on the issue see BDOW, vol. 10(2), chaps 41–4.
112 For the study of the milieu in which the conspirators moved see Dedijar (1966) and Zeman (1988).
113 Literally several tons of pages have been written on this subject. Albertini, in his *Origins of the World War*, devotes some 1,400 pages to the events during these six weeks. Yet, as James Joll says, even he is unable to convey the complexity and confusion that characterised the behaviour of participants; Joll (1984: 29).
114 See Steiner (1977: 232–3) and Herwig (1997: 103).
115 The most well-known recent study of causes of the First World War is Joll (1984), and of Britain and the causes of this war is Steiner (1977).
116 See Herwig (1997: 9–13).
117 Ibid., 10.
118 Ibid.
119 Geiss (1967: 70–2).
120 S.R. Williamson (1991: 200).
121 Cited in Joll (1984: 13).
122 L.C.B. Lieven argues that Russia's entry was the least calculated, the most unwise, and ultimately the most disastrous; Lieven (1983: 139–57).
123 Keiger (1983a: 153–98).
124 Herwig (1997: 24).
125 See BDOW, vol. 6, no. 50.
126 Steiner (1977: 221).
127 Ibid., 222.
128 Ibid.
129 Ibid.
130 Burnes Diary, 29 July 1914, quoted in ibid., 224.
131 Asquith to King George V, 23 July 1914, ibid., 225.
132 C. Howard (1967: 64–8).
133 Lichnowsky to Jagow (German Minister for Foreign Affairs), 29 July 1914, Geiss (1967: document no. 130).
134 See Herwig (1997: 27).
135 Joll (1984: 23).
136 BDOW, vol. 11, no. 275.
137 *Parliamentary Debates*, H.C., 3 August 1914, cols 1809–27.
138 French (1982: 31).
139 See Grey to Buchanan, 25 July 1914, BDOW, vol. 11, no. 112. See also no. 448.
140 Cited in Steiner (1977: 232–33).
141 Joll (1984), title of chapter 8.
142 Wilkinson (1998: 97–115).
143 Ibid.
144 On this see K.M. Wilson (1987a: 149).
145 Ibid.
146 P.M. Kennedy (1980: 461).
147 Minutes of 12th Meeting of the CID, 6 December 1912, PRO, Cab. 38/22/42. Minute by Crowe, 1 March 1912, BDOW, vol. 8, no. 321.
148 Brock (1988: 152).
149 Ibid., 159.
150 It is not clear whether it was an intentional effort or reflection of his inner concern.
151 See Steiner (1977: 239).
152 On this see Brock (1988: 178).
153 Steiner (1977: 246, also ch. 10), also French (1982: 87); P.M. Kennedy (1981: 138–9).

154 Bertie to Nicolson, 28 November 1912, Nicolson Papers, F.O. 800/36D. See also Nicolson to Buchanan, 31 December 1912 and Nicolson to Cartwright, 7 January 1913, ibid., nos 361–2.
155 See BDOW, vol. 11, no. 490.
156 All these adjectives/phrases have been used by Steiner (1977: 226–7, 238).
157 Goschen to Nicolson, undated, January 1913, Carnock Papers, F.O. 800/363. See also BDOW, vol. 3, no. 299.
158 Grey to Goschen, 2 January 1914. Also Buchanan to Grey, 6 January 1914, BDOW, vol. 10(1), nos 457, 459.
159 Cited in K.M. Wilson (1987b: 182).
160 BDOW, vol. 10(2), no. 538 and vol. 11, no. 125.
161 Cited in K.M. Wilson (1987b: 193).
162 Cited in K.M. Wilson (1987a: 162).
163 Ibid., 95.
164 Steiner (1977: 227).
165 Ibid., 230.
166 See BDOW, vol. 11, no. 96. Also K.M. Kennedy (1980: 453).
167 See Steiner (1977: 232).
168 Ibid., 231.
169 Ibid., 234–5.
170 K.M. Wilson (1987a: 149).
171 K.M. Wilson (1987a: 162). On Grey's resignation see BDOW, vol. 11, nos 42, 447.
172 French (1986: 2).
173 Steiner (1977: 246).

9 Conclusion

1 Cited in C.J. Lowe (1965: 11).
2 Eyre Crowe to Leo Maxse (editor, *The National Review*), 15 October 1902, cited in K.M. Wilson (1987a: 59).
3 Cited in Friedberg (1988: 209).
4 Chamberlain (1974: 133), title of chapter V.
5 Marshall (1995: 383).
6 Bartlett alludes, from time to time, to the passion for economy amongst the Members of Parliament (Bartlett 1993). Also see Davis and Huttenback (1986: 10, 145).
7 P.M. Kennedy (1980: 468).
8 The ethical and liberal dimension of British foreign policy is emphasised even now. See Marshall (1996: 13); Martin and Garnett (1998: 849–70).
9 See Davis and Huttenback (1986). Of the articles that appeared after the publication of this work, see O'Brien (1988) and Offer (1993: 215–38).
10 On this see Offer (1993: 215–38).
11 Steiner (1977: 248); Martel (1986: ix).
12 Steiner (1977: 246).

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